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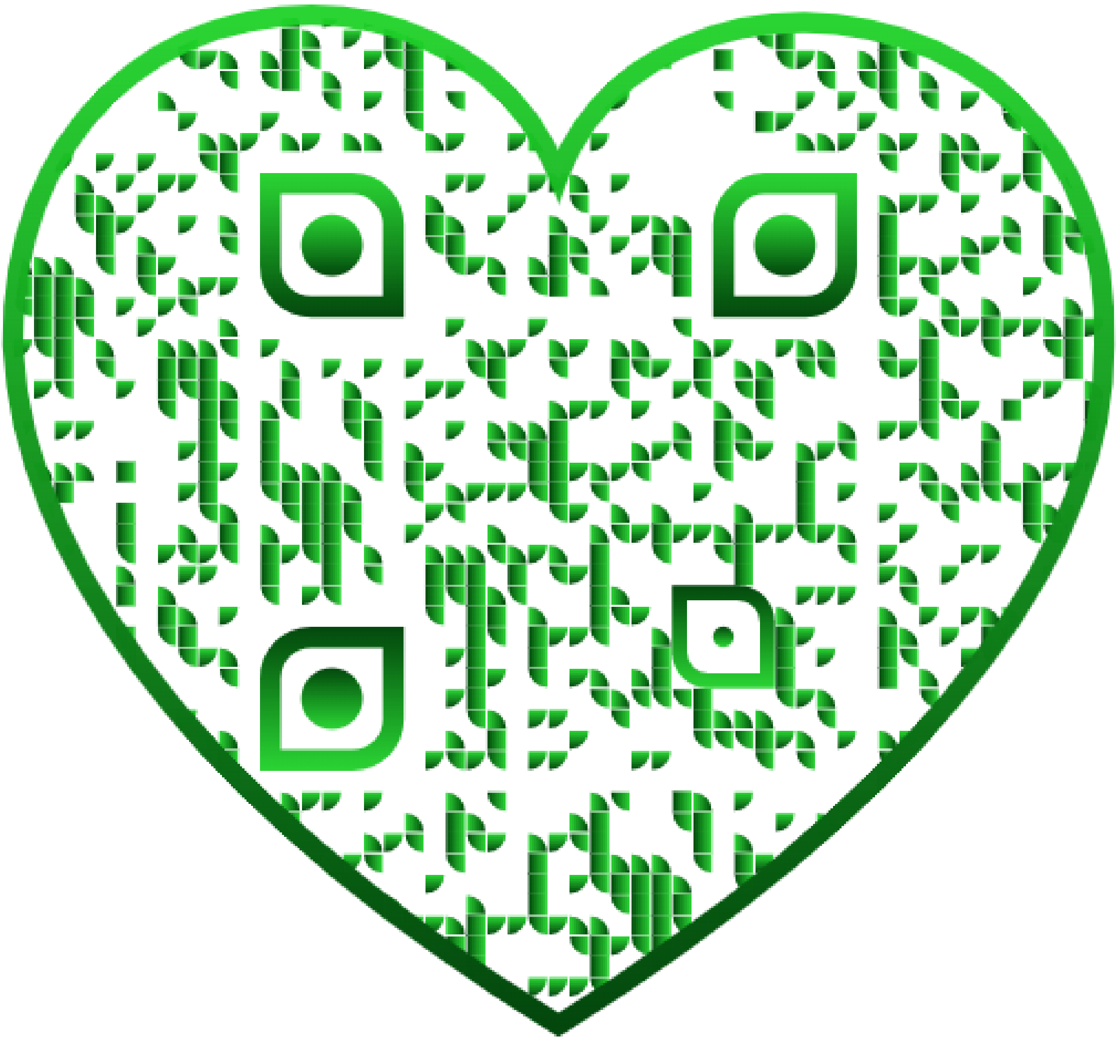

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THE NEW
eONE-SIXTY SL

MERIDA.com.au meridabikesaus

PHOTO: **GRAEME MURRAY / RED BULL**

Norco's Gracey Hemstreet does it again, winning the Red Bull Hardline in Maydena, Tasmania.

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Red Bull HARDLINE

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boost mobile
SRAM
SRAM
ROCKSHOX
MAXXIS

PHOTO: **CLANCY KELLY**

Think you can whip? Check out the shapes that were thrown at Cannonball's Deity Whip Wars; the ultimate clash of mountain bike athletics and culture.

CANNONBALL
101
FOX

PHOTO: **CLANCY KELLY**

↖ Sian A'Hearn floats through Kosciuszko Flow on the way to the win.

AMB

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COVER: Ryan Walsh puts the Amflow PL Pro through its paces. Photo: Jordan Riddle.

THIS PAGE: Matt Jones flips into the finish at Red Bull Hardline in Maydena, Tas. Photo: Nick Waygood.

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AMB

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editorial

ADVENTURES AHOY

WORDS ANNA BECK

In our last issue I discussed how you have to trust the process of life and roll with the changes. Skipping ahead a few months into autumn, I've increasingly found myself embracing the curiosity of what could lie ahead. As my third AMB magazine, this issue represents finding my feet in a few aspects of life. I'm getting more time on the bike (though it's still not very much, but I've accepted the fact that I may never see a 15 or 20 hour week again). My baby is a toddler and my tween? A teenager.

As the sands of time pass through the hourglass, I find my feet in the new world order; as a recreational 'athlete' mum of two, as the editor of a magazine and storyteller, and in my own quest for the solace of a long adventure, and rediscovering the dopamine high that comes from the thrill of hurtling down a hill at pace.

Through the process of bringing you this issue, my little person continues to grow and begins to enjoy heading around the yard on their trike, while my eldest tries her very hardest to drop me down Kozciouscko Flow trail at Thredbo. She'll get me eventually...but perhaps not until next year! What a time; when you can really, truly enjoy the trail with your kids for the precious few years before they ship out of home and start to build their own lives.

So in this issue we have tried to share the thrill of adventure, bringing you a splash of FOMO as we head to Pakistan in search of an epic mountain bike adventure on virgin trails, previously unridden by bikes. Our 2024 AMB photographer of the year, Matt Rousu, writes a behind the scenes feature about the thrills and perils of shooting a mountain bike World Cup at Mont-Sainte-Anne, Canada. Our trusty contributors weigh in on how best to navigate introducing your little people to a life behind handlebars so you can continue adventuring through all stages of life.

We have also added in a new feature 'The Big Adventure', a focus on the wild tales of adventure, or misadventure, that happen on two wheels. Our first writer for this feature is Ella Bloor, renowned gravel and mountain biker who seeks out challenges across Australia (literally!) and the globe.

And of course, we bring you reviews from our trusted contributors, including the world shattering Amflow PL Pro featuring the new DJI Avinox M1 motor.

So, strap yourself in for a big adventure across the globe, or perhaps a smaller one closer to home with your own little people. I hope you enjoy this content, and perhaps it will inspire you to take on your own big adventure.

Be good to yourself and each other, and happy trails!

AB

ADVENTURE
LIKE
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Photo: Rocky Trail/Nick Waygood

NZ MTB RALLY

A Test of Grit and Adventure
The New Zealand MTB Rally is a race for those who live for a challenge. The 6 stage enduro event isn't just about crossing the finish line – it's about conquering some of the toughest terrain, enduring hours in the saddle, and immersing yourself in one of the most stunning landscapes in the world. Starting in Nelson, NZ, riders head to Wairoa Gorge, Silvan, Golden Bay, Cable Bay, Wakamarina and Nelson City trails across the 6 day event.

Don't love the climbs? The crew at NZ MTB Rally have prioritised shuttles where possible, even including a heli-biking day. How many mountain biking stage races feature 4WD, boat and helicopter rides?

The Course: Rugged, Remote, and Relentless
The route covers 25 to 35km of riding each day, with expected ride time of 4 to 6 hours a day, with significant climbs and technical descents that forces riders to constantly shift gears both mentally and physically. The stages feature a mix of grade 4 to 6 trails (blue to double black in Aussie-speak) that demand focus and precision.

A Sense of Community: More Than Just Racing
While the NZ MTB Rally is undeniably competitive, it's also about camaraderie. Riders aren't just out there to race each other; they're there for the experience, for the challenge, and to share the journey with like-minded individuals. There's a unique sense of community we have experienced at multi-day events like this – everyone is in it together, battling the same terrain, facing the same obstacles, and even the biggest names like Sam Blenkinslopp and Matt Fairbrother have their own trials and tribulations along the way.

Why Ride It?
For the seasoned rider looking for something more than just another race, the NZ MTB Rally is an opportunity to experience true adventure on once-in-a-lifetime, technical trails.

In essence, the NZ MTB Rally is about exploring the rugged South Island, weaving through mountainous tracks, remote backcountry, and high-altitude vistas. It's a race that's as much about resilience as it is about speed, rather than a set of isolated stages it's an adventure that takes riders through long, grueling days of varied terrain, demanding serious endurance and technical skills.

It's not a race you just sign up for on a whim, it's a challenge you take on because you know it will make you a better rider, a more resilient person, and will reward you with memories that last long after the dust settles.

If you're looking for an event that will push you to your limits, while offering a sense of camaraderie and adventure that goes beyond the typical race, this is the one to mark on your calendar.

NZ MTB RALLY

March 22–29 2025

March 14–21 2026

What is it?
A week-long, all inclusive, multi-day enduro stage race starting in Nelson, NZ

Race Details
6 days, 27 stages, 4–6 hours ride time a day, 25–35km daily distance, up to 3000m descending every day!

Trail Difficulty
Trails range from grade 4–6, (blue to double black in Aussie-speak) with 80% being blue and black trails.

The first two editions of the NZ MTB Rally sold out immediately, so head to nzmtbrally.com to sign up to the email list to ensure you don't miss out for 2026!

GOLDSTONE'S RETURN TURNS TO GOLD

On February 8 Jackson Goldstone took out the top step of Red Bull Hardline in Maydena, Tasmania, in a time of 3:17.096; 0.233 seconds ahead of up and coming rider Asa Vermette (USA), with Australian Troy Brosnan sliding into third.

The win marks the Canadian phenom Goldstone's return to racing after a crash in 2024, describing the win as "Probably one of the biggest moments in my life."

It was another win for team Canada with rider Gracey Hemstreet taking the win in the women's category, making it two-for-two at the Maydena Hardline event. Hemstreet was the only woman to make it to the startline on race day after the demanding course took out competitors leading into the finals. Despite this, the women's field continues to gain strength at the Red Bull Hardline events.

HOW IT UNFOLDED

Charlie Hatton of Great Britan was first down the hill, setting a cracking time of 3:26.697. He sat pretty in the hot seat while Josh Bryceland, Australian legend Sam Hill and Matt Jones completed their runs, Jones celebrating with a backflip on the last gap jump. It wasn't until several riders later when Sebastian Holguin of Colombia finally snatched the top step, taking over three seconds from Hatton's time with 3:23:388.

Laurie Greenland couldn't quite match the speed of Holguin, but nudged out Hatton for second – just – with a time of 3:26:667.

The places began to topple, as New Zealand's Tuhoto-Ariki Pene went faster again, then Bernard Kerr knocked Pene from the hot seat.

With four riders remaining, South Australian Troy Brosnan was the first rider to go under 3:20, diving into 3:19.479, a time that fellow South Australian, Connor Fearon, chased hard to beat. Fearon was close, but no cigar, finishing behind Kerr. This resulted in a Brosnan, Kerr and Fearon virtual podium.

Seeding second behind Asa Vermette, Jackson Goldstone began his run with startling speed, gaining time on Brosnan on every split as he pumped the trail and whipped between the trees. A lightning quick 3:17:096 couldn't be beaten by the final rider on course, Vermette, who finished a third of a second back in 3:17:329.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Australian GOAT Sam Hill getting amongst it with the young pups on the hardline course, working his magic on some stealth lines displayed by the Aussie contingent.
- Matt Jones throwing a backflip on the final jump.
- Gracey Hemstreet owning the 80ft gap on the course, taking her second win at Red Bull Hardline in Maydena.
- Troy Brosnan is back, baby! If his win in Mont-Sainte-Anne wasn't confirmation, this surely is.

LOWLIGHTS

- Dan Booker was on a scorcher until he landed a rear flat on the final set of jumps. Flats: thumbs down!
- George Brannigan (NZ) was also hooking until a small slide out on the key section saw him lose significant time, he still slid into 11th.

You can rewatch Red Bull Hardline on Reb Bull TV. The next Red Bull Hardline takes place in Wales, UK, 26–27th July 2025.

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LAUNCH INTO MOGO!

Mogo Trails is Australia's newest mountain bike trail network, carving through the Mogo State Forest, south of Batemans Bay in the Eurobodalla Shire of New South Wales.

ABOUT MOGO

Stretching from the coast to the mountains, this spectacular, purpose-built network will have 78 individual tracks, adding up to around 125km of rideable trails. In the middle of the network is the small village of Mogo, where riders will find access to trailheads, parking, and a shopping strip with niche retailers, cafés, great coffee, and gift shops.

The eastern branch of the trails opened in August 2024, and the highly anticipated western network, with its challenging mountainous terrain, is set to be completed and ready to ride in April 2025. While everyone's been hitting up the 80km of eastern trails, which include gravity, tech, and jump lines, there's a lot of hype building for the western side. An adventure trail, which starts at the top of Wandera Mountain – linking you to Mogo and Batehaven – will be the highlight. Just because it's an adventure trail doesn't mean it's for beginners, it will be a challenge. The Wandera Trail won't be revealed until the grand opening, and machines are still chipping away at the time of publication.

AL CAPONE AND THE ILLICIT LETTUCE

A talking point for riders has been the origin of the curious trail names. Al Capone's Garden, Skyrabbit, Devil is the Temptor, Compression Session, Currywang, The Narcissist, and Mayday Mayday are just a few of the quirky trail titles you can find at Mogo. Every trail name has a backstory related to a peculiar construction aspect. It could relate to an incident, as in the case of Mayday Mayday: during construction, a hydraulic line burst on an excavator, which started spinning out of control. The operator was on the radio calling “mayday!” Al Capone's Garden was named when the trail builders stumbled across an illicit crop of the devil's lettuce and a stolen safe containing passports.

Strange names and tales aside, the complete network caters to all levels of rider with trails from green to double black. Some trails are suitable for adaptive riders and e-bikes as well. As each trail has been completed and tested, the Mogo Trails project team has uploaded the details to Trailforks, so check the app to plan your ride.

Heading to Mogo? Here are some fuelling options, as recommended by locals:

Check out **Grumpy & Sweethearts**, a popular café in the middle of the main street. They pride themselves on serving great food and amazing coffee.

The **Mogo Brew Crew** is another great option for amazing coffee, serving from their cute retro caravan at the village's southern end.

Hunger flat? Head to **Mogo Fudge** and Ice Cream Shop. That sugar hit will have you powering up those climbing trails.

If you're riding from the Botanic Garden trailhead, make sure to pop into the **Mossy on the Gardens Café**. Another local fave with a super-fresh menu and excellent coffee, which you can enjoy on the large outdoor deck overlooking the gardens.

Fancy a beverage? Head out to **Foxdog Distillery** and try the gin and tonics, and casual dining options. Nearby, the **Broulee Brewhouse** packs a huge punch with their craft beers and ales, light menu options, and a super-relaxed beachside vibe. For a top-end dining experience, book a table at **Arlo Restaurant** at the Oaks Ranch.

For more information on the destination, visit eurobodalla.com.au and mogotrails.com.au

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New Products

You know what they say, new gear, new you. Here's a look at some fresh bits landing in Australia.

PIVOT TRAILCAT SL AND TRAILCAT LT: A TALE OF TWO BIKES

Pivot Cycles expands its mountain bike lineup with the introduction of the Trailcat SL and Trailcat LT, two new models that cater to distinct riding styles while sharing a common foundation. Replacing the Pivot trail 429, the Trailcat features new generation geometry, carbon frames, new lifetime warranty and two different platforms based around one frame.

A few additional 'nice-to-have' features include internal frame storage, a low/high setting (allowing all models and sizes of the Trailcat to operate in a 'mullet' 29"/27.5" wheel configuration), UDH, and internal cable routing. Converting your Trailcat SL to an LT model does require different linkage and suspension, but it's exciting to see brands offering bikes with more customisation options in their builds. Let's take a quick look at the two models.

MAXXIS
MAXXIS

TRAILCAT SL: BUILT FOR SPEED AND AGILITY

The Trailcat SL is designed for riders who prioritise speed and efficiency. Its lightweight frame, coupled with a responsive suspension featuring 120mm of travel with a dw-link suspension ensures a nimble and lively ride. This is paired up with a 140mm Fox 34 up front, allowing for a more capable ride than a regular cross country bike.

With five build options available from SLX/XT ($9999) to the Team SRAM XX Transmission model with a carbon wheel upgrade ($15999), the Trailcat is a premium offering. The SL model is targeted towards riders prioritising climbing and descending with precision, making it ideal for riders who prefer a lively and energetic ride feel. Cross country riders looking for a little more travel, or trail riders seeking an efficient and responsive ride will also find a friend with the new Trailcat SL.

TRAILCAT LT: PLUSH COMFORT AND CONFIDENT CONTROL

The Trailcat LT, with its 135mm of travel and a slightly more relaxed geometry, offers a plusher and more forgiving ride. It's built for riders who seek out challenges and want confidence on technical terrain, perhaps the enduro rider looking for a more playful rig or the rider looking for a capable everyday ride. The 135mm rear travel of the LT is married up with a 150mm Fox Performance or Factory 36.

The LT is offered in six builds, from $10499.00 to an eye-watering $18999 for the SRAM XX Transmission model.

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PEATY'S RIM TAPE AND TUBELESS CONVERSION KIT

Steve Peat is a guy who knows a thing or two about flat tyres. His new range of rim tapes come in four sizes, from 23mm for road and CX applications, all the way up to 37mm for wide DH rims. With optimal stretch, bespoke premium adhesive, and a semi-transparent design that allows you to easily find the valve hole, Peaty's rim tape strikes the balance between strength and stretch for an air-tight experience the first time.

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Conversion Kit including sealant and valves:
RRP $129.95
peatys.co.uk

SKS AIR-X-PLORER DIGITAL GAUGE 10.0

In a sport where the difference of one or two PSI can make the difference between a race-winning run and a terminal rim hit, the SKS Air-X-Plorer is a sensible workshop purchase.

With a multi-valve head to accommodate all valve types, the Air-X-Plorer Digi features an LED digital pressure gauge and can deliver pressures up to 10bar (145psi). A 1200mm hose length makes inflating tyres a little less tricky in tight spaces, while the soft-touch grip of the handle provides a luxurious pre-ride experience.

RRP $149.99
fesports.com.au

SKS
AIR-X-PLORER

GRANITE STASH RATCHET TOOL

If you're someone who likes to be prepared but dislikes riding with a pack or a pocket full of spares, Granite is coming to the rescue with their new Stash Ratchet Tool (RT).

The Stash RT features a clever design that's compatible with all forks (excluding the Fox 38 Performance), using the dead space within the fork steerer to house 9 tool bits and a mini ratchet wrench.

You can even purchase a separate Scope Mount, allowing you to mount a Garmin or Wahoo computer on top of the tool, and the lower cap can be converted to store an Apple AirTag (sold separately). We can't wait to get out on an adventure with the Stash RT so we can use our pockets for their ultimate purpose: snacks.

RRP $109.95
kwtimports.com.au

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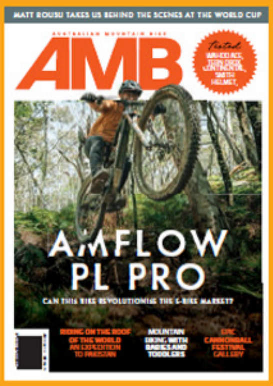

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CALENDAR

Got an event to feature in the calendar?
Email us at Anna@ adventure entertainment.com

XC/XCM AND THE REST

15 March	**Goodness Gravel Orange**	Orange, NSW	goodnessgravel.com
21 March	**Rocky Trail Academy**	Nerang, QLD	rockytrailacademy.com
21-23 March	**Oceania Mountain Bike Championships**	Queenstown, NZ	auscycling.org.au
28 March	**Rocky Trail Academy**	Narooma, NSW	rockytrailacademy.com
25-27 April	**Weekend in Wondai**	Wondai, QLD	bq.org.au
26 April	**Karri Cup**	Northcliffe, WA	auscycling.org.au
3 May	**Convict 100**	St Albans, NSW	convict100.com.au
14-18 May	**UCI Masters World Championships XCO**	Cairns, QLD	auscycling.org.au
31 May-1 June	**NSW/ACT XCO State Series 1**	South Coast, NSW	auscycling.org.au
14-15 June	**NSW/ACT XCO State Series 2**	Hunter Valley, NSW	auscycling.org.au
4-6 July	**Y2W: The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Adventure**	Ipswich, QLD	bq.org.au
5-6 July	**NSW/ACT XCO State Series 3**	Mogo, NSW	auscycling.org.au
24-27 July	**Reef to Reef**	Cairns, QLD	reeftoreefmtb.com

GRAVITY

16 March	**Outlaw DH 1**	Kooralbyn, QLD	ontheedgeevents.com.au
21-23 March	**Oceania Mountain Bike Championships**	Queenstown, NZ	auscycling.org.au
22-23 March	**Victorian DH Series 6**	Mansfield, VIC	vdhs.com.au
22-23 March	**WA Gravity Enduro 1**	Margaret River, WA	wagravityenduro.org
22-23 March	**Fox Superflow**	Nerang, QLD	rockytrailsuperflow.com
22-23 March	**Tasmania Enduro Series 4**	Maydena, TAS	auscycling.org.au
29 March	**Thredbo Gravity Series**	Thredbo, NSW	www.thredbo.com.au
29-30 March	**AusCycling DH National Series 4**	Orange, NSW	auscycling.org.au
29-30 March	**Fox Superflow**	Narooma, NSW	rockytrailsuperflow.com
29-30 March	**WA DH State Series 1/2**	Denmark, WA	auscycling.org.au
29-30 March	**Auscycling National Series DH**	Orange, NSW	auscycling.org.au
5-6 April	**Fox Superflow**	Falls Creek, VIC	rockytrailsuperflow.com
6 April	**SA Gravity Enduro Club Series 1**	SA TBC	auscycling.org.au
6 April	**Outlaw DH 2**	Toowoomba, QLD	ontheedgeevents.com.au
12-13 April	**WA Gravity Enduro 2**	Pemberton, WA	auscycling.org.au
12-13 April	**Inside Line DH State Series**	SA TBC	auscycling.org.au
26 April	**WA Gravity Enduro 3**	Albany, WA	auscycling.org.au
26 April	**Thredbo Gravity Series**	Thredbo, NSW	thredbo.com.au
27 April	**Renegade Gravity Series**	Scenic Rim, QLD	ontheedgeevents.com.au
3-4 May	**Tasmania Enduro Series 4**	Maydena, TAS	auscycling.org.au
14-18 May	**UCI Masters World Championships DHI**	Cairns, QLD	auscycling.org.au
21-25 May	**Crankworx Cairns**	Cairns, QLD	crankworx.com
1 June	**Renegade Gravity Series**	Scenic Rim, QLD	ontheedgeevents.com.au
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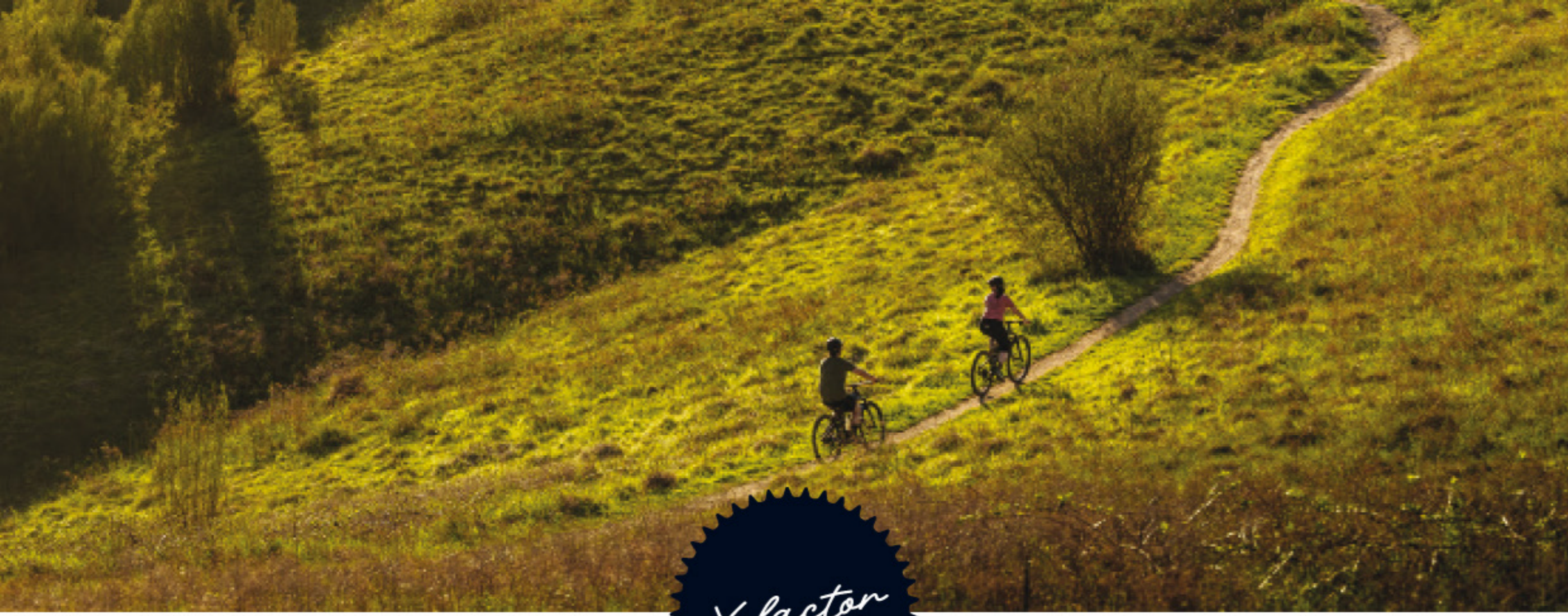

X-factor

FINDING TRAILS AND ROUTES

A GUIDE FOR NEW MOUNTAIN BIKERS AND THOSE NEW TO AN AREA

WORDS ELLA BLOOR / PHOTO NICK WAYGOOD

Whether you've recently relocated to a new place or are simply stepping into the world of mountain biking, the adventure of discovering new trails and navigating unfamiliar locations can be equally exciting and intimidating. For many riders, hitting the trail is about more than just physical activity – it's about the joy of exploration, the challenge of new terrain, and the sense of freedom that comes with riding outdoors. Sometimes, it's also about knowing exactly where you're going and switching off to the mindfulness of your favourite route.

Navigating the practicalities of finding routes that suit your experience level, fit your schedule, and align with your needs can take time. Having recently relocated myself, it's reminded me how much this knowledge can be taken for granted, so here are some tips to help you, whether you're new to the sport or new to the area.

FINDING LOCAL TRAILS

Start by researching trail networks in your area. Websites like Trailforks and MTB Project, as well as apps like Komoot and Strava, provide detailed maps and user-generated content that can guide you to popular trails nearby. Many local mountain biking groups and clubs also host events and can offer insight on where to find the best local trails.

One of my most used tools is Strava, which offers a feature known as 'Heatmaps'. If you're new to an area or just looking for some fresh trails to explore, Strava Heatmaps can help you pinpoint popular routes based on where other cyclists are riding. These maps provide a visual representation of roads and trails that riders frequent the most, essentially showing you where the best riding spots are located, all based on real-world data.

In urban areas, finding and learning the popular bike roads, as well as the pockets of greenspaces that have connecting trails and bike paths to keep away from busy roads, is a huge step towards making a dense city feel bike-friendly. Finding the best routes often involves trial and error, but every rider has their favourite trail and routes that take a little exploration to find. Ensuring you have good visibility, such as front and rear lighting, as well as avoiding peak traffic hours is highly advisable.

SKILL LEVEL AND SAFETY: CHOOSE WISELY

As you begin your search for the perfect trail, it's important to consider your skill level. If you're just starting out, look for easy or moderate trails that are well-maintained and have clear signage. These trails are usually well-marked with difficulty ratings, so take the time to study the signs and trail descriptions before setting off. Don't be afraid to stop and chat with other trail users and lean into local cycling communities like bike shops, clubs and groups.

While challenging yourself is part of the fun of mountain biking, riding a trail that's too difficult can quickly become frustrating, or worse, dangerous. When in doubt, walk it out.

TIME MANAGEMENT: LENGTH OF RIDE

Another consideration is the duration of your rides. Most trail maps provide estimated ride times, but always factor in extra time for breaks and mishaps. You never know when a good cafe, pub or bakery can appear. Always allow time to stop.

Be realistic about how much distance you can cover, especially if you're still learning your surroundings. It's better to start with shorter rides and gradually increase the distance as your confidence grows.

FINDING A COMMUNITY

One of the best ways to explore new trails and improve your skills is to get involved with the local mountain biking community. Joining a club or attending group rides is not only a great way to meet fellow cyclists but also an excellent opportunity to learn about hidden gems that you might not find on your own. Many clubs host regular social rides that cater to various skill levels and provide a welcoming atmosphere for newcomers. These rides can offer a supportive environment to help you build your skills and get to know the trails with experienced riders.

EMBRACE THE JOURNEY

Moving to a new area or starting from scratch presents a unique opportunity for growth and adventure. As you explore the trails, you'll find new places to push your limits, make new friends, and discover hidden beauties on your two wheels. While it can take some time to find your favourite spot, the journey itself is part of what makes mountain biking so rewarding.

Ultimately, whether you're new to the area or new to the sport, the most important thing is to enjoy the ride. Don't be afraid to get lost – sometimes the best trails are the ones you stumble upon by accident. So get out there, take your time, and let the trails reveal themselves.

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Trail talk

PAY-TO-RIDE: THE KEY TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR MOUNTAIN BIKING?

WORDS CRAIG MEINICKE / PHOTO BRETT HEMMINGS/RED BULL

Mountain biking has become a significant part of outdoor recreation in Australia, offering riders the opportunity to connect with nature, challenge their skills, enjoy world-class trails, and have fun with their mates. However, behind every tricky climb, thrilling descent or scenic outlook is a bunch of management activities and costs that all add up.

We live in an economic and social climate at present where funding for natural areas is not meeting the demands for recreational activities being placed on them. Many of our most prominent trail networks operate on tight budgets, relying heavily on volunteers or irregular grant funding to keep the wheels turning.

In response to this situation, several mountain bike parks and trail networks including Maydena, Tasmsnia (pictured), are embracing a pay-to-ride model, where riders contribute to trail management and maintenance directly through entry fees or annual memberships.

In 2022, Mystic Park in Bright, Victoria, introduced a park membership system to help fund trail maintenance and operating expenses. Before this, the park relied heavily on volunteers and limited funding, pushing it toward unsustainable operations and the risk of closure by the landowner.

Mystic's introduction of membership fees provided a stable revenue stream and allowed park managers to implement a mandatory waiver system for all riders, an important step in securing long-term viability. With these measures in place, the park was able to demonstrate sustainable operations to the landowner. For riders, this resulted in a significant boost to trail maintenance, improved infrastructure, and even the construction of new trails, ensuring the park's future as a premier mountain biking destination.

While this shift has sparked debate within the riding community, it also presents significant opportunities for the industry.

So, what are the benefits of pay-to-ride trails, and how can this model balance the expectations of riders who are accustomed to accessing trails for free?

THE BENEFITS OF PAY-TO-RIDE TRAILS

1. **Reliable Funding for Maintenance and Development**
   Pay-to-ride systems create a consistent revenue stream that can be reinvested directly into the trail network. Unlike grants or donations that can be unpredictable, entry fees allow for regular trail management and maintenance, ensuring trails remain safe, functional and fun. This funding can also support larger projects, such as expanding trail networks, building new features, or improving facilities like parking and toilets. For riders, this ultimately translates to a better, more reliable experience on the trails.
2. **Professional Maintenance Teams**
   With sufficient funding, trail managers can hire professional crews to maintain and upgrade trails. While volunteers play a vital role in the mountain biking community, relying solely on unpaid labour can lead to burnout and inconsistent trail care outcomes. Paid professionals can ensure the trails meet high standards and are maintained year-round, especially after adverse weather events or heavy usage.
3. **Enhanced Rider Experience**
   The pay-to-ride model often comes with added benefits for riders, such as better signage and mapping, dedicated emergency response resources, and improved on-site amenities or shuttle services. Riders are increasingly seeking well-maintained trails that provide for all skill levels, including the top end of our riding community, which are not always provided for in free trail networks. An established pay-to-ride system can deliver this premium experience.
4. **Reducing Insurance Premiums**
   Pay to ride has the potential to reduce insurance premiums and risk exposure to land managers and clubs. This is often a part of mountain biking that only raises its head when a serious accident takes place, and the land managers or club find themselves in a difficult situation. The impacts of these events impact all mountain bikers, land managers and the wider mountain biking industry.
5. **Environmental Sustainability**
   Trails require careful management to prevent erosion, minimise environmental impact, and ensure they merge with the natural landscape. A steady funding source allows for sustainable trail building and maintenance practices, preserving trails for future generations.
6. **Economic Benefits for Local Communities**
   Mountain bike trail networks that adopt a pay-to-ride system can become economic drivers for surrounding communities, attracting visitors who spend money on accommodation, food, and other services. The revenue generated from trail fees often has a ripple effect, boosting local economies.

While we have covered all the benefits of pay-to-ride trails, this model isn't without challenges. In the next issue, we explore some of the difficulties encountered with the pay-to-ride transition, and how to best address these for sustainable outcomes.

Happy Trails!

Craig Meinicke is the founder of Blue Sky Trails a trail consulting business, and Trail Vision, a software business for best practice trail management.

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CROSSROADS

WORDS CHRIS PANOZZO / PHOTO BARTEK WOLINSKI/ RED BULL

The coming years will be filled with defining moments for Downhill. Shifts in the race structure, team rosters, sponsorship dynamics and broadcasting rights are set to test the raw and unpredictable sport we know. For all the online whining about race coverage, privateers being locked out of competition, and tracks being dumbed down to suit TV, failing to evolve is to go backwards in an attention economy where the average online interaction these days is less than 30 seconds. Without falling into another spiral of finger pointing toward the reasons for the vast dissatisfaction of fans, there are no mutterings yet of the future challenges riders will begin to face if indeed the sport begins to provide mainstream appeal.

Downhill's trajectory isn't too dissimilar to what motorsport faced long ago. Within circles downhill is often referred to as the F1 of the mountain bike world. The speed, skill and danger of the mountain bike heroes and villains that make up the sport aren't too dissimilar from what F1 experienced in its early days. Privateers would turn up and have the chance to qualify against the might of manufacturer teams; some would make it, but most wouldn't. There would be fleeting coverage from a couple of vantage points that often wouldn't make sense as to why anyone would want to watch from that angle, even down to wild rumours of equipment not meeting the regulations that went unchecked, am I starting to paint a familiar picture here?

Putting to one side the hurdles downhill has to overcome to reach a mainstream audience, the raw and unpredictable nature of what makes the sport so exciting is about to be tested. Part of what makes the racing so exciting is seeing how difficult the course was to ride by those privateers hanging on for dear life. I've made mention before about some of the early runs of the finals are just as exciting as the winner, often from riders who may love the sport so much but unfortunately might not have the skill that matches their ambition, or more increasingly don't have access to the same equipment.

F1 can reach peak boring when it's clear there is a technical advantage by one team, and the same thing can happen on two wheels just as easily as four. I will add, however, that to reach such an advantage most F1 teams nowadays have more than 1000 employees, all of which are probably paid more than 99% of the elite field at a World Cup, so there's probably a bit more firepower for development than what is currently possible in World Cup teams.

So where to go from here? Well, it seems that the next steps are to professionalise the sport, eliminate the privateers, limit access and request high fees for the privilege, and money will come pouring in. The only thing we need now is an audience.

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU COMMIT TO A TRAIL FEATURE?

WORDS **DR KATH BICKNELL** PHOTO **BARTEK WOLINSKI / RED BULL**

Have you ever stood at the top of a trail feature ready to ride, but the fear of trying it for the first time is holding you back? Someone says, "you've just gotta commit!" and it's exactly what you needed to hear. You ride the feature without any drama and find yourself sharing those same words of wisdom with someone else.

So what is it about “you've just gotta commit” that is so effective? How does it help with overcoming fear on the bike? And how does it help you connect the dots between knowing what you need to do and actually doing it?

COMMITMENT AND COORDINATION

With many trail features, there are sections that we can only practice by actually riding them, so commitment is key. It's a bit like jumping off a diving board for the first time. You can imagine what shape you want your body to be at the movement's beginning, middle and end, and you can guide this process along the way. To do this, you must commit to that first step off the diving board and trust in your ability to link a few movements together on the way to the water.

The same goes for riding. You can know the point you want your front wheel to roll over on the entry and the speed you want to carry. Remember to relax and look ahead as you roll through the obstacle. And you can look to the exit and know what shape you want your body to be in when you get there.

When you're ready, committing helps with coordinating this process. It helps us know what information we need to feel clear about before we set ourselves in motion, and it helps us to relax as we tick those boxes on our first attempt.

THE POWER OF TRUSTING IN THE PROCESS

Whether you think it in your head or someone yells it from the side of the trail, “you've just gotta commit” is also a phrase that builds trust: trust in our technique, trust in our skills, and trust that the people we're riding with feel this too.

Trusting in our abilities helps us ride with more purpose and less fear. Fear makes us tense up, so we stop absorbing feedback from the bike and the terrain. We get pinged around, making bike control harder and worries bigger. In comparison, the confidence that comes with committing to an obstacle helps us drop that tension, increasing fluidity and control and our ability to absorb feedback from the bike and the trail.

That trust from others, when warranted, can lift our trust in ourselves, especially if it's a rider who's ridden that feature before. The risks of mountain biking are real, and a true ride buddy won't push someone who's way out of their depth. They'd be more likely to help you work out the line to ride or problem-solve a mini-skill that connects the bigger movement to nail a high-stakes feature.

A chicken line or opt-out point can also help with commitment – knowing where to put a foot down if needed. This means you can roll into something knowing you have a bail-out point. Having this bail-out point can reduce the inertia involved in trying something for the first time and add extra buffer or room for error if it doesn't go as smoothly as you hope.

THE RIGHT CUE FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT

“You've just gotta commit” is one of several little phrases, or cues, that help guide our bodies and brains in sophisticated ways. Knowing why the phrase is so effective helps you know if it's the right cue to draw on at that point in time: when you've picked your line, you're ready to drop some of the tension holding you back, you feel confident in the steps involved, and you're ready to connect it all together.

If you feel hesitation creeping in and whether that hesitation is warranted. Trust your preparation, commit when you feel ready, and enjoy the satisfaction of riding something new!

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The Big Adventure

ROLLING WITH IT

BIKE PACKING ARKANSAS HIGH COUNTRY

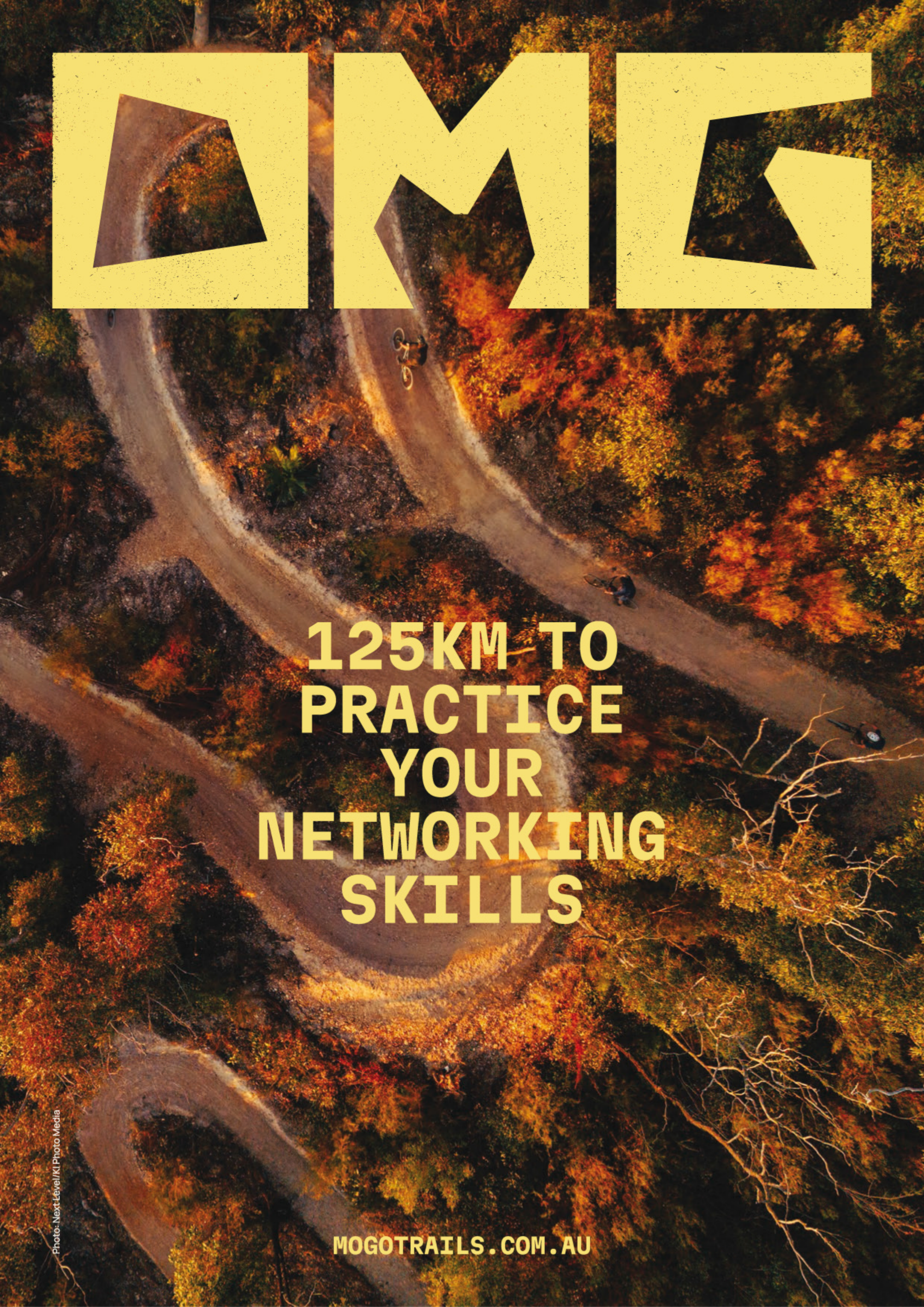
WORDS AND PHOTOS ELLA BLOOR

Bike packing, for me, has evolved from throwing a few clothes and a credit card into a saddlebag, riding to a pub, and returning the next day to venturing into some of Australia's most remote regions, covering distances I never thought I was capable of. Each trip is a new lesson in preparedness, and the confidence and skills required to tackle the unknown grow every trip. Some of the best adventures are the simple ones. They don't have to be the longest, most gruelling journeys, they don't have to cost a fortune, and they don't have to be logistically complicated. Some of my favourite, and most cherished, adventures have been the spontaneous ones. The stars align and before you know it, you're packed up and rolling.

In the depths of Australian winter in 2024, I rode my bike from Perth to Sydney (which is a whole different story), and soon after completing what was easily the biggest adventure of my life, I hopped on a plane to the U.S. for the Cross Country Marathon World Championships in Snowshoe, West Virginia. I went from using every minute of the day to etch towards the eastern coast of the country to sitting in a hotel room atop a ski village, waiting for the race to come.

I'd forgotten that racing (sometimes) involves a whole lot of waiting and recovery to optimise performance, which is probably one of the many reasons I love a good adventure: the thrill of escapism and distancing yourself from your usual routines. New scenery, weather challenges, overcoming mechanicals, the spectacular unknown. It's addictive and brings a whole different lens to riding a bike.

Once the World Championships were over, I made my way to Bentonville, Arkansas, where I'd spend the next month. Hungry for more adventure and that sense of freedom, I met Ernie, a former professional road cyclist who had also fallen into the world of adventure – think the infamous Silk Road Mountain Race in Kyrgyzstan – and he'd also held the fastest known time (FKT) for the local 'Arkansas High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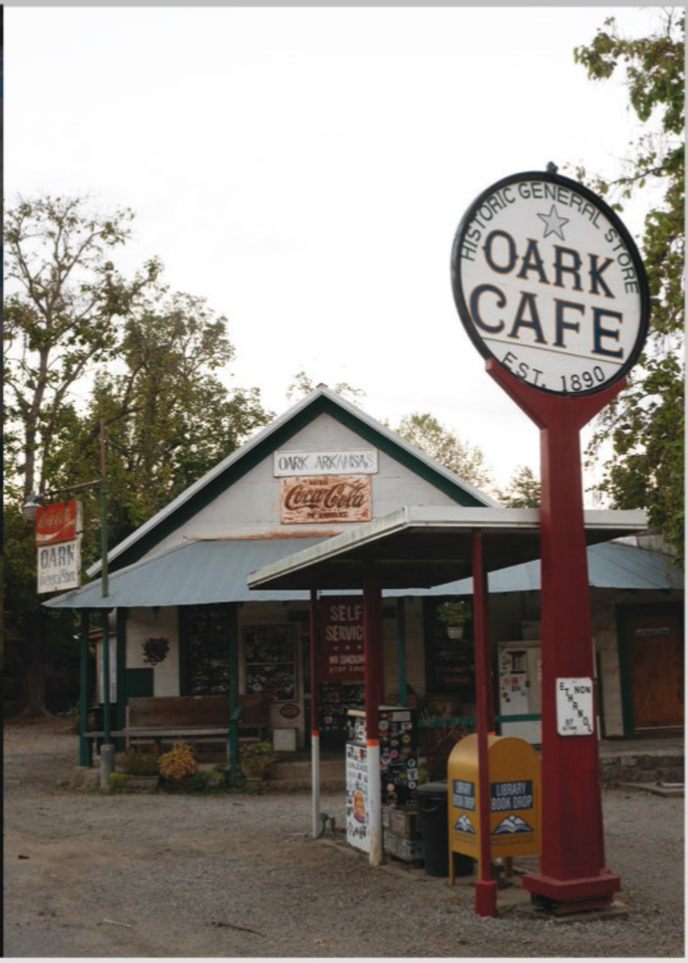

Country Route'. Ernie spoke so passionately about the route and hyped it up so much that within 24 hours, we packed some burritos into bags and were off on an adventure. It's probably the most spontaneous bike-packing trip I've ever taken, but when someone promises a good time, it's hard to say no.

We planned to tackle the Northwest loop, a 380km sample of the 1600km route. Something I thought we'd easily chew through in a couple of days. We managed to hustle together some gear, and before we knew it, we were heading into the summer heat. Whenever I venture into the outdoors, I always have an underlying caution for bad weather and being prepared for cold temperatures. Aside from knowing where my water points are, I've never really felt unprepared for the heat, but it's a silent killer.

After a day of riding, the sun began to dip, and we finally made it to a small town called Oark. Ernie's kit was crusted in so much salt it looked like he had gone for a dip in the Dead Sea, and he probably felt like he had. Spontaneous trips are a lot more fun if you've conveniently got a decent level of fitness to support an impromptu 200km day. We rolled past a scattering of homes, a school, and found a (closed) general store with a sheltered picnic area to the side. I started unpacking the gear I had hastily grabbed and looked down at my thermal tights, thermal shirt, wool socks, and beanie. What was I thinking?! Reluctantly, I changed out of my kit and into my thermals, despite the warm, summer evening. Meanwhile, Ernie was coming to terms with his misplaced sleeping mat and knew he'd be in for a stiff night. Maybe fun, spontaneous adventures still need a gear list, a check of the weather forecast... and a self-assessment on whether you're fit enough to take it on.

Despite being a little underprepared, the Ozark mountains had delivered a spectacular day of riding. As I lay under the starry sky reflecting on the day with Ernie, I felt my adventure cup filling up. It was funny to think that just over 48 hours earlier, we were toying with the idea of heading out on this route, and here we were making it happen. It's a reminder that we all have excuses and constraints, but sometimes it's worth pushing them aside for a little unexpected adventure and time outdoors.

The night air was still uncomfortably warm, and I barely lasted a few minutes inside my bivvy before feeling like the sweaty burrito I had stuffed into my bike bag earlier that morning. There's a strange comfort in the nylon shelter of a tent or bivvy, blocking out creepy crawlies and (in the U.S.) an imaginary shield against large mammals like bears or mountain lions. I begrudgingly got out of my bivvy and into the open, hoping to catch a breeze. As I lay exposed atop my bivvy in the early hours, I felt a wet nose and heard sniffling. It took me a moment of panic to realise it was a dog—not a raccoon or, worse, a bear. Getting my face licked by a stray dog at 3am wasn't on my bike-packing bingo card, but hey, here we are.

The morning came, and the town was blanketed in thick, humid fog and we began to put on yesterday's crusted kit. I used to be really stubborn about not re-wearing gear, but now I'm all about minimising what I carry.

Fresh kit, I've learned, is a luxury that disappears within the first few kilometres of a climb, and we had a big one out of town. We climbed for nearly an hour out of Oark, and it became clear that Ernie had depleted too many minerals the previous day, and our spontaneous "Yeah, let's just wing nearly 400km," plan might have been a tad too ambitious. On the theme of stubbornness, it's important to know when to push on with grit and when to admit it's no longer fun – which is always a tough call. Once Ernie was collected, I put in my headphones and made the most of my remaining 100km or so, albeit solo.

On paper, it probably seemed like a failure, but that's the beauty of adventure, isn't it? It's never the perfectly planned, or a perfectly executed journey that ends up being the most memorable. It's the moments when things go wrong, when the heat almost breaks you, or when you lose sleep to having a stray dog lick your face in the depths of the night. The chaos, the unpredictability, the moments of 'what was I thinking?'—they're all part of the story. So even if you're under-prepared, a little bit sweaty, or slightly over-ambitious, the adventure is still there, and part of it is just to roll with it.

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CANNONBALL 2025

The Thredbo Cannonball Mountain Bike Festival is one of the biggest mountain bike festivals in Australia. The 2025 event saw over 750 competitors tackling the five events, with more than $120,000 in cash and prizes on the line. From the lung-busting Osprey All-Mountain Enduro to the iconic RockShox Australian Open Downhill on Australia's iconic Cannonball run, photographer **Clancy Kelly** was on location providing us with all the action.

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OSPREYALL-MOUNTAIN ENDURO

The opening event, the Osprey All-Mountain Enduro, saw Luke Meier-Smith take the win in the Pro Men's category, with Jack Moir 17 seconds back, and Bailey Christie rounding out the top three 24 seconds behind Meier-Smith. With such big gaps in the men's field, would Meier-Smoth be ahead of the field the whole week? In the Pro Women's race, Sian A'Hern, Elleni Turkovic, and Jess Hoskin claimed the top spots, with young Tukovic only 6 seconds behind seasoned professional A'Hearn.

Sian A'Hearn started with a dominant win in the Osprey All-Mountain Enduro

Fans can get up close and personal with their idols at Cannonball

Jack Moir tests the lungs on the gruelling Osprey All-Mountain Enduro, finishing second but a way behind Luke Meier Smith

Eleni Turkovic was hot on the heels of A'Hearn during the Fox Flow Motion Cup

Luke Meier-Smith took a second win on the Fox Flow Motion Cup.

Chase Minos hauled his way into second in the U19 category in the Fox Flow Motion Cup.

FOX FLOW MOTION CUP

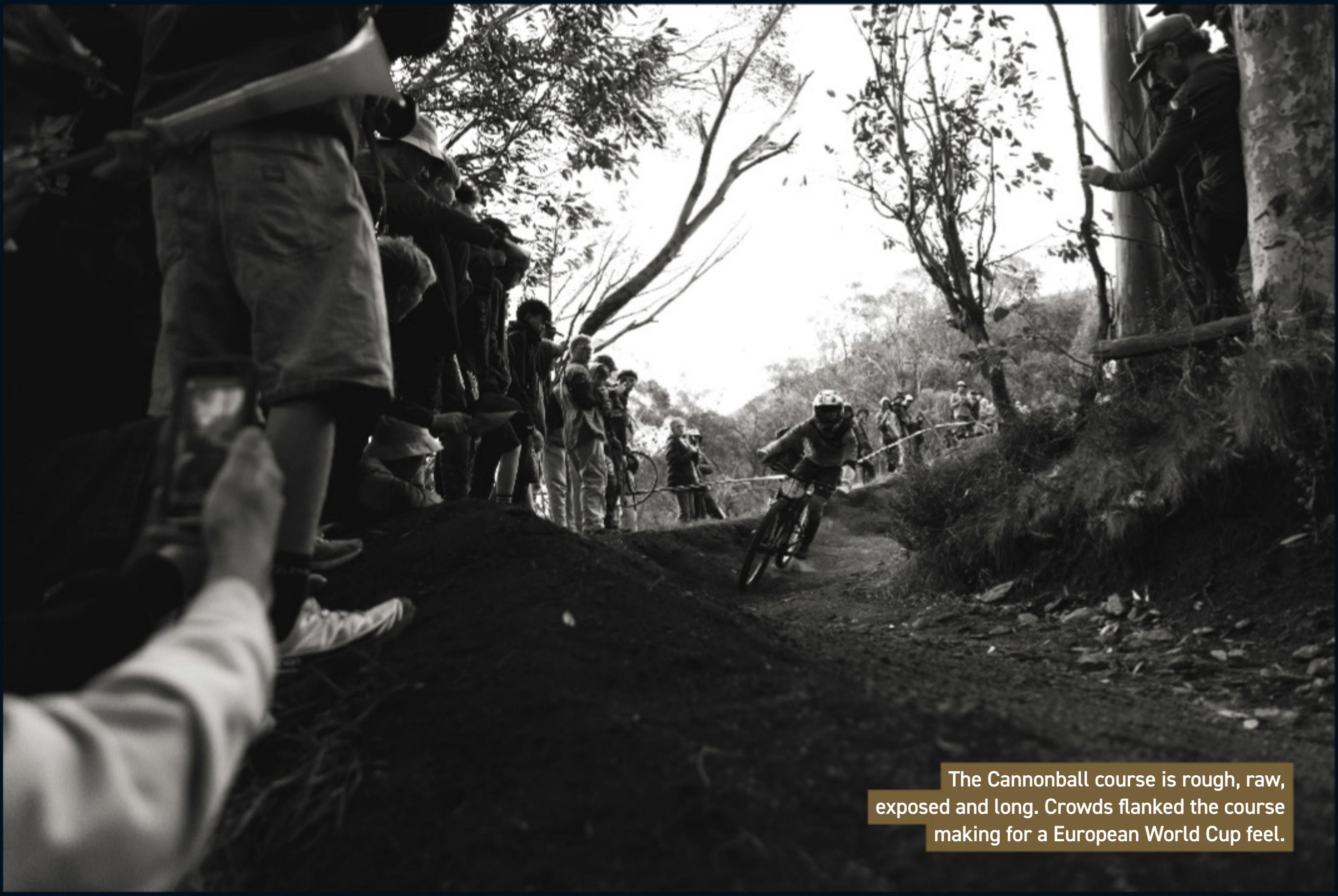
The Fox Flow Motion Cup brought fast-paced action, tight racing, and an electric atmosphere as riders took on the Kosciuszko Flow trail. Over 500 competitors charged down a refreshed course, featuring new technical sections, massive berms, and long traverses that tested riders speed and endurance.

The Pro Men's podium was fiercely contested, with Luke Meier-Smith once again claiming the top spot many seconds ahead of Jack Moir and Tom Locke. In the Pro Women's race, Sian A'Hern dominated, followed by Elleni Turkovic less than a second behind, with Ellie Smith 3 seconds back. While the men's race seemed to become more settled, the women's race for the overall remained tight.

MAXXIS DUAL SLALOM

As the sun dropped behind the mountains of Mount Kosciuszko, the Maxxis Dual Slalom stole the spotlight. Set on the Friday Flat ski slopes, this event was a showcase of riders' precision and speed, featuring off-camber grass turns that ensured riders were drifting from start to finish. The crowd was treated to tight racing as competitors raced for the fastest lines and ultimate bragging rights. Luke Meier-Smith continued his winning streak, with Sam Butler in second and Tom Locke making a second trip to the podium. The women's pro field saw a bit of an upset as those with a BMX background shone. Caroline Buchanan ousted former Gravity national champion Leanna Curtis for the win, with young Brisbane rider Sacha Mills claiming third.

BMX legend Caroline Buchanan leaned into the win at the Maxxis Dual Slalom event.



The Cannonball course is rough, raw, exposed and long. Crowds flanked the course making for a European World Cup feel.

Relief? Fatigue? Emotion? Yes. Troy Brosnan takes a moment after his race-winning run.

Groms rub shoulders with their World Cup heroes at Cannonball.

ROCKSHOX AUSTRALIAN OPEN DOWNHILL

At last, the piece de resistance, the RockShox Australian Open Downhill. After rain foiled the Oakley Pump Track Challenge and Downhill seeding on Friday, it was on like Donkey Kong on to see if Meier-Smith could do it again or if Tory Brosnan, hot off his third place at Red Bull Hardline, could claim the top spot.

Troy Brosnan laid down a blistering run to take the fastest time of the day, finishing 1.859 seconds ahead of last year's winner, Jackson Frew. Connor Fearon put in a strong performance to round out the podium, finishing 2.6 seconds behind Brosnan, with Meier Smith in fourth.

Sian A'Hern took the women's win by an impressive 3.733-second margin over Elleni Turkovic. Ellie Smith completed the podium, crossing the line 10.484 seconds off the pace.

As the sun went down on the RockShox Australian Open Downhill, Luke Meier-Smith and Sian A'Hearn were crowned the King and Queens of Cannonball, cementing their dominance and setting them up for an exciting 2025 European race season.

FUTURE SHREDDERS

From babies to toddlers and beyond, we speak with the AMB fraternity about the best ways to introduce your small person to mountain biking.

WORDS **ANNA BECK**
PHOTOS **GERARD LAGANA, DAVE MACKISON**

When Danny McAskill released his video 'Danny Daycare' a few years ago, it begged the question of mountain biking parents everywhere, what's the best way to get my child onto the trails?

Mountain biking can be an adventure, but embarking on the wild ride of parenthood is perhaps the biggest adventure you can go on in life. With all the demands of parenting, it's undeniable that the adventure of parenthood significantly decreases your riding time.

A generation of mountain bikers that grew up with good-quality suspension and increased trail access are now hitting CPA (critical parenting age), and now there are more and more ways to mountain bike with small people.

So what's the best way to get out and enjoy the trails when you find yourself in the chaotic first few years of parenting? We sat down with a few of AMB's mountain bike families and friends to discuss the multitude of ways they can hit the trails and bring their kids along for the ride. If you have a small person in your life, read ahead to see how the crew have managed to explore trails as their families have grown.

BABY TRAILER ADVENTURES

Briana, Nathan and Baby Tanner

Briana Tomkins is a long-time cyclist who embraces many disciplines, from road to mountain biking and everything in between. She welcomed her first son Tanner into the world in early 2024, and he has already been adventuring off-road in their Thule Chariot trailer. Briana shares her experience below.

"We are using the Thule Chariot Sport Double. We also purchased the Thule Chariot Baby Supporter, which acts almost like a bucket seat, as we wanted extra comfort and support for Tanner. This has come in handy, as we started riding with him in the trailer shortly after he was sitting upright (unsupported) at around 6 months of age. I own a gravel bike, and my husband Nathan owns a Specialized Levo SL, which has been great for a little bit of pedal assist when we want (and need) it."

"We started off with a couple of exploration rides around our neighbourhood on bitumen. It was a smooth ride for Tanner and a safe, low-stress option for our first couple of outings. We are so close to the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT), so we then rode the smoothest, flattest part of the BVRT from Brassal to Fernvale and back, 50km total. This was a great ride, as it is a mixture of paved paths and very smooth gravel."

"Our toughest ride so far has been our weekend bike-packing trip from Esk to Linville and back on the BVRT. We underestimated the combined challenges of the extra weight of our camping gear, the elevation and the headwind. The terrain was a lot rougher than previous rides we have done, and we found that most areas of the trail have a narrow single lane, which is great for a bike to follow, but the wheels on the trailer are always on either side in the rough, meaning constant drag, no matter what you do!"

"Multiple sections of the BVRT have sharp descents and climbs that forced us to swap the trailer back and forth between bikes constantly, and the Levo SL did not have enough battery power to do the entire journey on its own, so it was a fine balance of energy levels, strength, and enthusiasm."

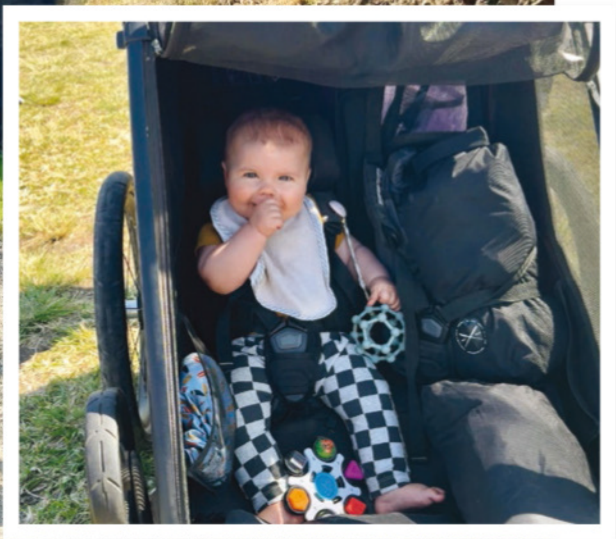
"We made it to Linville with just minutes of daylight to spare, setting up our camp quickly and making it to the pub just in time for dinner and to get the Levo to 70% charge at the pub before they closed for the night. The camping part of this trip was actually the most enjoyable. Tanner slept in between Nathan and I on his own sleeping pad from a bassinet, but I can see us needing a bigger tent for future trips. If we were to do another bike-packing trip, I would focus on a shorter distance ride, and focus more on enjoying the destination and experience."

"The Chariot is great. Its limitations are more about the bike that's doing the towing and the legs on the rider. It's certainly a challenge to change your mindset from covering distance on the bike to focus more on the overall experience and enjoyment of the ride. The only other thing that really needs to be considered is the heat and dust inside the Chariot. On cooler days we used the rain cover to minimise dust, however, the Chariot quickly heats up so doing longer rides or rides later in the day are not really recommended in the summer."

"As Tanner grows we want to get a Shotgun or Mac Ride style of attachment for our bikes. Of course, he will have his own bike as soon as he is ready!"

BRI'S HOT TIPS:

- *Focus on the journey and experience rather than training*
- *Schedule your adventures around the weather*
- *Look for suitable places for whatever product you're using: smooth gravel is great for the trailer, but it becomes very difficult when trails become more overgrown or technical!*
- *Trailers can require specific attachments for the axle, check compatibility with your bike*



CARGO BIKES, REAR-MOUNTED BABY SEATS AND MAC RIDES WITH TWINS

Hayden, Ashley, Lilly and Tilly

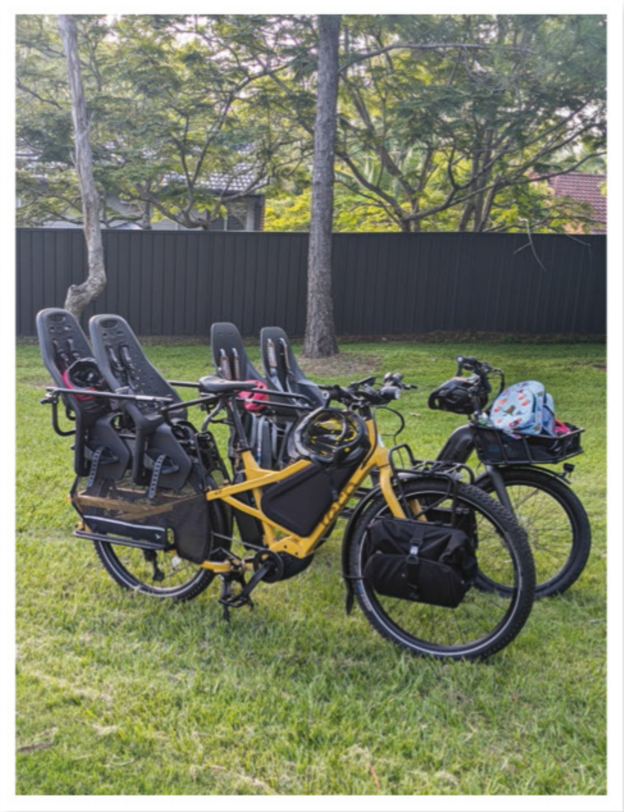
Contributor Hayden and his wife Ashley are dedicated mountain bikers who welcomed twin girls into the family in 2023, Matilda and Elizabeth (Tilly and Lilly). Twins pose a unique question: what happens when you have two or more children of the same age? While it's common to see a riding family with a baby on the bike and a toddler on the balance bike, having twins requires some creative thinking to get the family on the trails. Hayden shared his experiences.

“I've found that when the girls were really young, it was difficult to do anything cycling-related. As they grow and develop neck strength we put them in a bike seat to take them out and about with us. Now they love bikes because of that. Getting a cargo bike was the next step. Any trip within a 5km radius we do on the cargo bike. They're a lot happier on the cargo bike than in the car and we barely use our second car because of that.” Hayden and Ash have been using an urban cargo bike, but have recently tested the Tern Orox, featured on page 100.

“The biggest challenge is the parent-to-kid ratio,” Hayden says. “It's super difficult to get out and use any attachment with one kid and one bike because, for obvious reasons, if there is only one parent around, we can't go out. Using the Mac Ride seat attachment (reviewed page 109) allows Ash and I to take the girls on some trails and weekend picnics in the bush.”

“The next step is riding for recreation, riding trails and going for picnics. From there, we have Strider bikes ready to go. The plan is to get them into some lessons at a pump track and then into a kid's program. We want to treat mountain biking as an organised sport rather than something you do alone.”

“The Giro Scamp helmets have fit them both really well. They have good adjustability and the girls don't get annoyed when it's on their heads. We started with the helmets when they were really young, before they even started on bikes. We got the helmets, let them play with them, and put them on even when they were crawling around the living room. So they're very, very used to having the helmets on. As a result, now it's not an issue, they know if they go on the bike, they wear a helmet; it's not even a thought process for them.”



HAYDEN'S HOT TIPS:

- *Introduce the bike helmet early, even when doing non-bike-related things*
- *Look for a helmet with a good level of adjustment*
- *Adjust your expectations when riding with multiples. It may take a little longer to get them on the trails!*

PROGRESSING TO SOLO RIDING: TRIKES TO BALANCE BIKES

Gerard, Annelie, George, Felix and Max

Shortly after Hayden and Ash had their twins, AMB photography wizard Gerard (G) and partner Annelie announced they were adding twins to their family. I caught up with Annelie to discuss their experience with eldest son George migrating to two wheels, and how riding may take shape with a family of three in the future.

"We first started using the Shotgun (similar to the Mac Ride) at around 18 months old. It's recommended you wait until two, but we never took it on the trails to begin with because we focused on getting him safe and comfortable in the street. We personally found trails a little bumpy at this time, but he was surrounded by bikes and really took to his Kinderfitz Trike."

"He started just walking around with the trike, and then around a month later, he rode it properly. Because he's a small person, his interest of course ebbed and flowed. When he was around two, he really fell in love with it again, and we soon switched to a Specialized Hot Rock balance bike at around 2.5 years old. He was also getting too tall for the Shotgun and hitting my chin when we rode, so progressing to his own bike has been a real win."

George now hits up the skills park on his balance bike, and with Annelie and Gerard's low-pressure approach to mountain biking, George is free to explore and develop his own passion for the bike.

Three kids force a whole new perspective on getting out on the trails with kids, and Annelie isn't sure what lies ahead for them, "It may be G and I with a Shotgun or Mac Ride on each bike and George on his own bike. We are also considering a Chariot trailer or perhaps even a cargo bike with front space for three kids. That will be a challenge getting off-road, though!"

ANNELIE'S HOT TIPS:

- *Never push kids to get on the bike, let them explore at their own pace.*
- *Ride ahead of your child when they graduate to their own set of wheels – they love following the leader!*
- *Make bikes enjoyable and plan activities like picnics and playdates alongside bike rides.*

THULE
SWEDEN

FRONT-MOUNTED SEAT AND E-BIKE

Anna, the teenager and baby Gary

When my first daughter was a baby, we had a Thule Chariot, though it was predominantly used as a running aid. But fast-forward 12 years to our second child, and e-bikes are firmly in the cycling zeitgeist. Living on a mountain, the e-bike is the only way I can ride from home and get back up my hill with a baby.

It took a bit of research to find a bike that would facilitate the front-mounted bike seat we wanted to use, the Thule Yepp Mini. This seat requires a fair amount of steerer to be exposed in order to facilitate the clamp, so steerer tube length was a key driver in my decision to purchase a Cannondale Moterra SL e-bike as a daycare commute and baby-adventure vehicle.

There are several front-mounted seats on the market, but we chose the Yepp Mini seat due to its small profile, lightweight design and ease of removal. I can load up for the 10km trail ride to daycare with the Yepp Mini, then remove the seat and leave it at daycare. This means I can ride home through technical trails without a baby seat between my knees. The Thule mount remains on the steerer tube, but it's reasonably unobtrusive and doesn't bother me.

I'm not going to pretend that riding with the Yepp Mini replicates a regular ride experience, on a medium bike at 168cm tall I have to move my knees outwards when pedalling. I removed the footwells on the Yepp Mini straight away in order to steer more effectively, which leaves Gary's feet unsupported, but the moulded, bucket-style construction of the seat and restraint straps make me feel confident when riding. Plus, his feet often end up in the handlebars!

Because of the secure fit, Gary's reluctance to hold on at all times is also not a dealbreaker as it would be with the Shotgun and Mac Ride, but at 13 months old, the front mounted seat allowed us to get out on the bike well before the age of 1. Having your child right between your arms is such a great way to share the joy of riding bikes, and to echo a theme, my next move will be a Shotgun or Mac Ride before a balance bike.

On the other end of the parenting spectrum, we are now far beyond the years of balance bikes with my eldest daughter. A product of the mountain biking kids revolution that's been developing over the past decade, she shreds hard on her extra-small framed 27.5" trail bike.

Riding as a family certainly gets a bit easier with age, especially as kids move to 26" wheels and beyond. The weight and efficiency of bikes really impact their ride experience. As a dedicated 'non-cyclist', getting her out on the bike requires pulling in friends and emphasising the social aspect of riding, and a chairlift or shuttles always sweetens the deal!

AB'S HOT TIPS:

- *Start by integrating short rides into your day before moving to longer or more challenging rides*
- *Plan for snack stops and breaks and plan rides around nap times!*
- *Things are always much better if you can select a route that features a few farm animals*
- *Check your bike's and seat/trailer's compatibility before purchasing*

PLANNING YOUR RIDE

There are many things to consider when it comes to taking your younger child mountain biking. Firstly, the age, strength and capability of the child informs your choice of product. Many options require a baby to have good neck strength, but really what is required is core body strength, so waiting until your child can sit unassisted is generally reccomended before exploring with a trailer or baby seat.

Products like the Mac Ride and Shotgun lack seatbelts and also require the child to be able to sit and support their weight though their legs and arms and grip with their hands, meaning that they're not suitable for kids until around 18 months old.

Another thing to consider is the trail experience itself. All products mentioned in the article reach their limits very quickly on challenging terrain, so choosing your ride route wisely is key. Starting on flatter bikepath and fireroad allows you to understand how the bike rides with a seat or trailer and little person on board; it's a very different experience from a solo ride!

While riding with kids gets you out and about, you may have to temper your need for riding drops, jumps and rough trails for a while with your small person. Not only do tech trails make for an extra-jiggly ride for a baby in a seat, the vibration forces from larger impacts make it quite difficult for little hands to hold onto the bars, or feel secure in a trailer.

There are many ways to plan a ride with small people to ensure their introduction to the trails is a success and there are a few themes that dominated the conversations with the families who shared their experiences.

Starting small is crucial. If you have installed a bike seat or trailer on the bike and are testing it out, starting out by doing some driveway laps or riding around the block is a great way to get going. This gives you time to test the set-up while being close enough to home to duck back if anything needs adjusting with tools, or even if your little one is overwhelmed by the newness of it all. Getting to the trails themselves may take a little bit of time!

Speaking of time, bank on taking far more than usual. While you may only cover a few kilometres when starting out, slowing down and taking it all in makes it a much more enjoyable experience for your child and can help foster a love for the outdoors that is lifelong. Punctuating your ride with snack stops, birdwatching and jumping on crunchy leaves isn't mandatory, but is recommended.

Don't forget to pack supplies, your handy hydration pack can come in handy here; ditch the bladder and pack with snacks, sunscreen and nappies and wipes as needed. Hopefully they're not needed, but a few emotional support bandaids can go a long way when dealing with grazes and scrapes.

Another key aspect of riding with kids to consider is the fact that it's simply a very different experience from enjoying the trail pre-kids. Whatever product you choose to ride with your little ones will have it's negatives, whether it be needing to adopt a knees-out pedalling style or the weight and accessibility limitations of a trailer. Keep in mind that while it may not be your best-ever sendy ride with heaps of airtime and Strava KOM's, it may just be your little person's best day out to date!

Mountain biking is an amazing sport that sparks a sense of adventure beyond the ride itself, and it's an amazing feeling to share this wonder with your children (or grandchildren, little siblings or nieces and nephews). For kids and adults alike, mountain biking means exploring new places, discovering hidden spots, respecting nature and creating stories. If you're reading this magazine, you already know that mountain biking's not just a sport but an limitless possibility on two wheels. If you can successfully instill a little person in your life with a passion for two wheels, maybe, just maybe, one day you'll get to rip down the iconic trails of Thredbo, Blue Derby or Maydena with your mountain biking teenager and that, my friends, is the ultimate mountain biking win in life.

THE DIRT ROAD TO THE BLACK PEARL

PROJECT MOSHY: HALFWAY POINT UPDATE

At the time of writing this, it's over halfway through Project Moshy's lead into the Quad Crown Black Pearl, which is set to take place as this magazine prints on the 7–9th March. We check in with Ben 'Moshy' Morrison to see how the transformation from downhill demon to cross country whippet is going, how the Specialized Epic and RockShox Flight Attendant is faring, and discuss his physical preparation for the event.

WORDS BEN MORRISON, ANNA BECK
PHOTOS LUKA MANSON

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FLYING WITH THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Flight Attendant promises to 'make you the fastest version of yourself', an automatic suspension system that gathers data from multiple sensors in order to activate your suspension remotely; no lockout lever or button is required.

Unlike former attempts at automated suspension – think Fox Live Valve or even the Cannondale ELO of yesteryear – Flight Attendant has harnessed the power of technology by incorporating the entire system's user data, including power, seat post drop and suspension kinematics.

Open, Pedal and Lock are the three main settings that are automatically engaged based on sensor input. Flight Attendant also allows your fork and rear shock to use different compression positions based on what the terrain demands.

As a long-term mountain biker, Moshy says he is "50/50" on manual lockout, but the addition of Flight Attendant has revolutionised his riding experience.

"Changing up the suspension has been a bit of a journey, but I have landed on my preferences with the Flight Attendant after a long period of seeing what it could do, " he says. "It took a bit of getting used to, and it takes a little bit of time on the bike for the Flight Attendant to understand you as well."

Flight Attendant finds a neutral setting but offers a firmer or softer platform or 'bias' that allows riders to customise the feel of their suspension, whether they prefer a more forgiving, open setting (-2) or a firmer, stiffer platform (+2) or something in between.

"I've been playing with bias, and I have landed at -2, which is the most 'trail' setting; it's reluctant to lockout unless it's smooth and flat. Originally, I preferred the neutral 0 setting, and then went to -1 and now to -2."

"I find that -2 gives me extra grip when dieseling through technical sections on the Epic, and works well for seated climbing. I will still occasionally turn the lockout on, but -2 is the focus for single-track efficiency. The more active suspension feels more natural. I don't even notice that the rear shock changes. There is a mildly audible noise with activation, but I don't even notice it anymore."

Moshy states that for more cross country applications, like the Black Pearl, he may move towards the neutral or stiffer settings, "Trekky (Brendan Johnson, marathon racing icon) likes more compression, so he is using harder setting of flight attendant at +2, and not using a lockout at all. I'll test this through race simulation in the coming weeks."

RockShox claims this system has resulted in a 1.8% increase in speed between the tape, a huge increase if you're racing at the World Cup level, but what does it mean for the average rider? We will catch up with Moshy after the big event to see how Flight Attendant performs in a race situation.

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COMFORT IS KEY

Spending time training on a bike with the wrong set-up can lead to all sorts of musculoskeletal unhappiness. Moshy opted for a longer bar and stem combo to reduce this risk, increasing stem length from the stock 60mm to 80mm. He also opted for a wider seat, the 155 Roman Evo mirror replacing the narrower 143mm power saddle.

But cockpit hardware only tells part of the story, any rusted-on endurance warrior knows that it's the delicate balance between chamois and saddle that makes the difference between bum bliss and blisters.

In order to lean into this cycling bliss, Moshy is training and racing in Maap's Alt Road range of kit. Unlike their more traditional range of jerseys and bib shorts, the Alt Road is targeted towards gravel and mountain bikers.

"The Alt Road cargo bib differs in the addition of pockets on the bib straps; one is a nifty central pocket perfect for a phone, with two zipper pockets on either side. At a glance both the cargo bib and Maap's regular bib look the same, even using the same chamois, with the exclusion of leg pockets on the liner. Maap uses a semi-sheer material in the cargo bibs to help with breathability when worn under their over shorts. These have been perfect for casual cross country riding, and they even dry quickly when used for unplanned water-hole swims when training in hot Australian conditions" Moshy says.

"Along with updating the Alt Road cargo bib, Maap also revamped their Alt Road jersey with enhanced breathability by using a lighter-weight Merino blend fabric. The jersey fits true to size, but is more relaxed than their figure-hugging road cycling range."

"Maap is also offering a Tech Tee in the Alt Road range, which is a nice fit and not overly baggy, with a fair bit of stretch for comfort and agility. The Tech Tee is a perfect match with their over shorts to keep it casual, or for those who want performance without the traditional lycra look."

"Maap's Alt Road range is an excellent product that toes the line between svelte, figure-hugging lycra, and baggy trail riding attire. It allows comfort and breathability for cross country performance in a more casual package."

Maap.com.au

Got FOMO? Check out the next Quad Crown Event

THE SUNNY 80

Where: Sunshine Coast, QLD

When: June 6–8, 2025

What is it? A three day micro stage race taking in the Sunshine Coasts best trails. Race format is a 10km prelude Friday afternoon, followed by a 30-40km stage on both Saturday and Sunday. Challenging enough for the elite athlete racing at the front while still being achievable for the weekend warrior!

Check it out at quadcrownmtb.com.au

COMPONENT UPDATES

Moshy is enjoying the long term loan of the Specialized Epic 8. "The Specialized Epic 8 is proving to be a much more capable descender than expected," Moshy explains. "There have been times when the 4-piston SRAM Level Ultimate brakes are out of their depth, even with upgrading the pads and rotors to the Galfer brand. I can see why the bike comes standard with a 180mm front rotor! I have joked to other riders that if I had bigger brakes and more aggressive tyres, I could easily get in lots of trouble pushing the bike to its limits."

"So far I have had one rear flat that sealed fast with the Pirelli sealant, enabling me to limp home. I have since pumped the tyre back up with no issues or plugs being needed. The Pirelli Scorpion RC 2.4 (pro wall) tyres are wearing reasonably well but may need to replace the rear before the Black Pearl, and try the Scorpion RC lite casing on the front to see how that holds up in rough terrain when I'm on the rivet."

"While I love the DMR Brendog Raceday Death Grips on my Firebird I am not doing 3- and 4-hour rides with no gloves on it like I am on the Epic 8. So, I think I will look at something like the ODI F-1 Series Dread Lock as they offer them in a Lock On which I like. It could just be my modern-day office hands being a bit delicate but there is only one way to find out."

fesports.com.au
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TRAINING AND FUEL

Moshy has been speaking with Pure Sports Nutrition to assemble a nutrition plan for the Black Pearl. "I've noticed that eating in single track is hard to do!" Moshy says. "I have a plan now to focus on pre-fuelling before the race to ensure my glycogen stores are high, then using gels and high-carbohydrate electrolytes in my race bottles, and recovery food and shakes post-training to make sure I'm getting the most out of my available training time."

Moshy completed his ultra-endurance gravel event and has now pivoted towards the high-intensity of cross country mountain bike events. "From here on, I have racked the roadie on the weekend for the most part, and I'm riding the Specialized Epic and getting comfortable being uncomfortable on the dirt," he explains.

"The training is quite different from leading into the gravel event, and my weeks will include two, hour-long group rides at quite a high intensity and the occasional race to practice race execution. The remainder of my rides must be fairly controlled at a low intensity."

Moshy's plan represents a realistic way to train for many of us, using existing social group rides with some hard efforts for intensity, sandwiched between easier days at a controlled power or heart rate.

So how is Moshy adapting to the new world order of training for cross country racing?

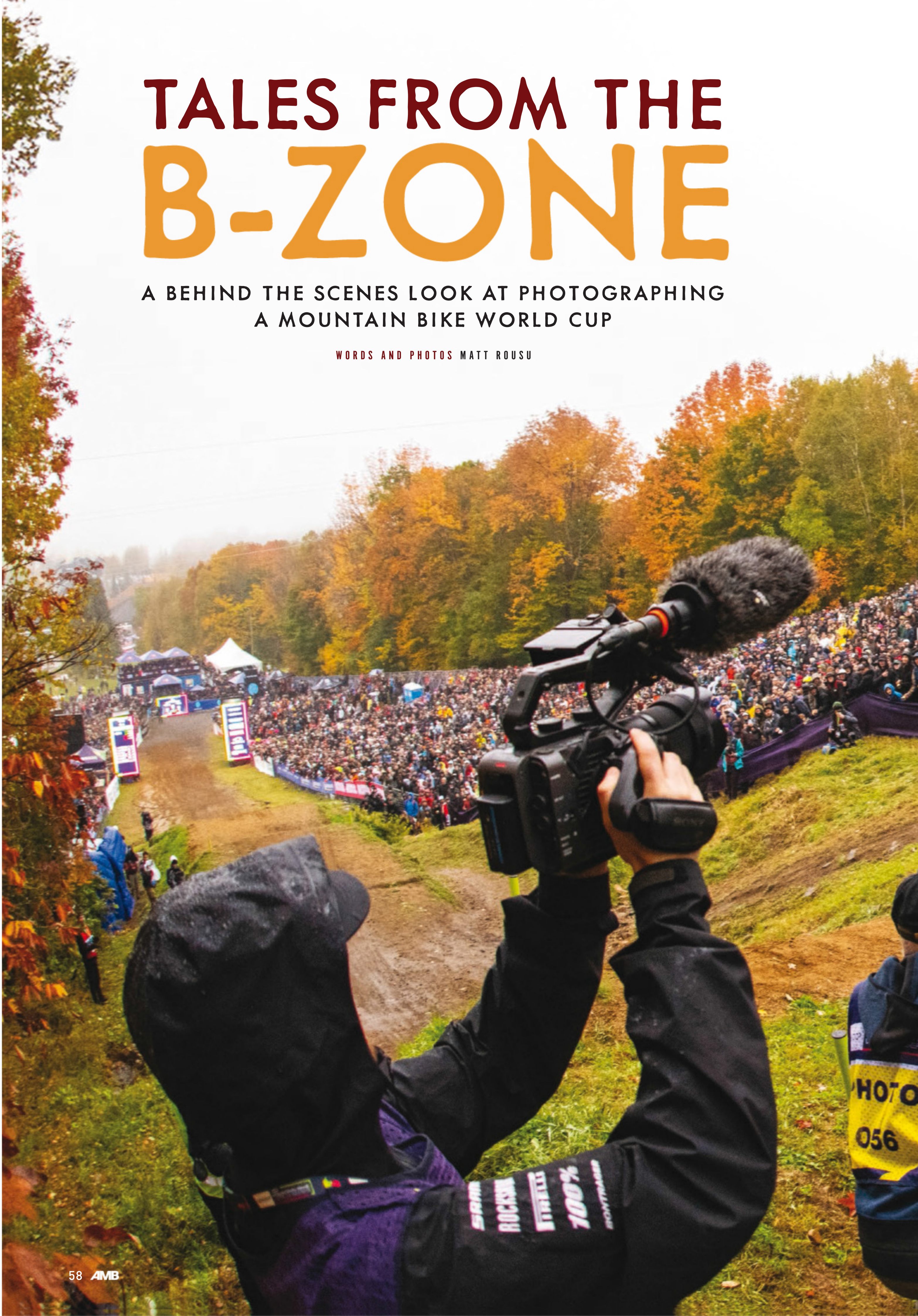
Well, he's jazzed enough on climbing mountains that he's planning to race at Mt Stromlo in the upcoming national round as a bit of a test event in order to work on fuelling and strategy. Will Moshy become a lycra convert? Is he destined to be our next dedicated cross country bike tester? Only time will tell, so check in with us for a final update in issue 213 of AMB.

puresportsnutrition.com

TALES FROM THE B-ZONE

A BEHIND THE SCENES LOOK AT PHOTOGRAPHING A MOUNTAIN BIKE WORLD CUP

WORDS AND PHOTOS MATT ROUSU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Matt Rousu, the 2024 AMB Photographer of the Year travelled to the Mont Sainte-Anne (MSA) World Cup (October 3-6) to cover the World Cup from a photographer's point of view, it's a lot less simple than you might think…

So you're sitting on the couch at home at some awful hour of the morning watching the live broadcast of a World Cup event. You've forked out the $32 a month to stream Stan Sport and are enjoying watching the best riders in the world battle it out bar to bar in the cross country (XCO), or hurtle down the mountain against the clock in the downhill (DH).

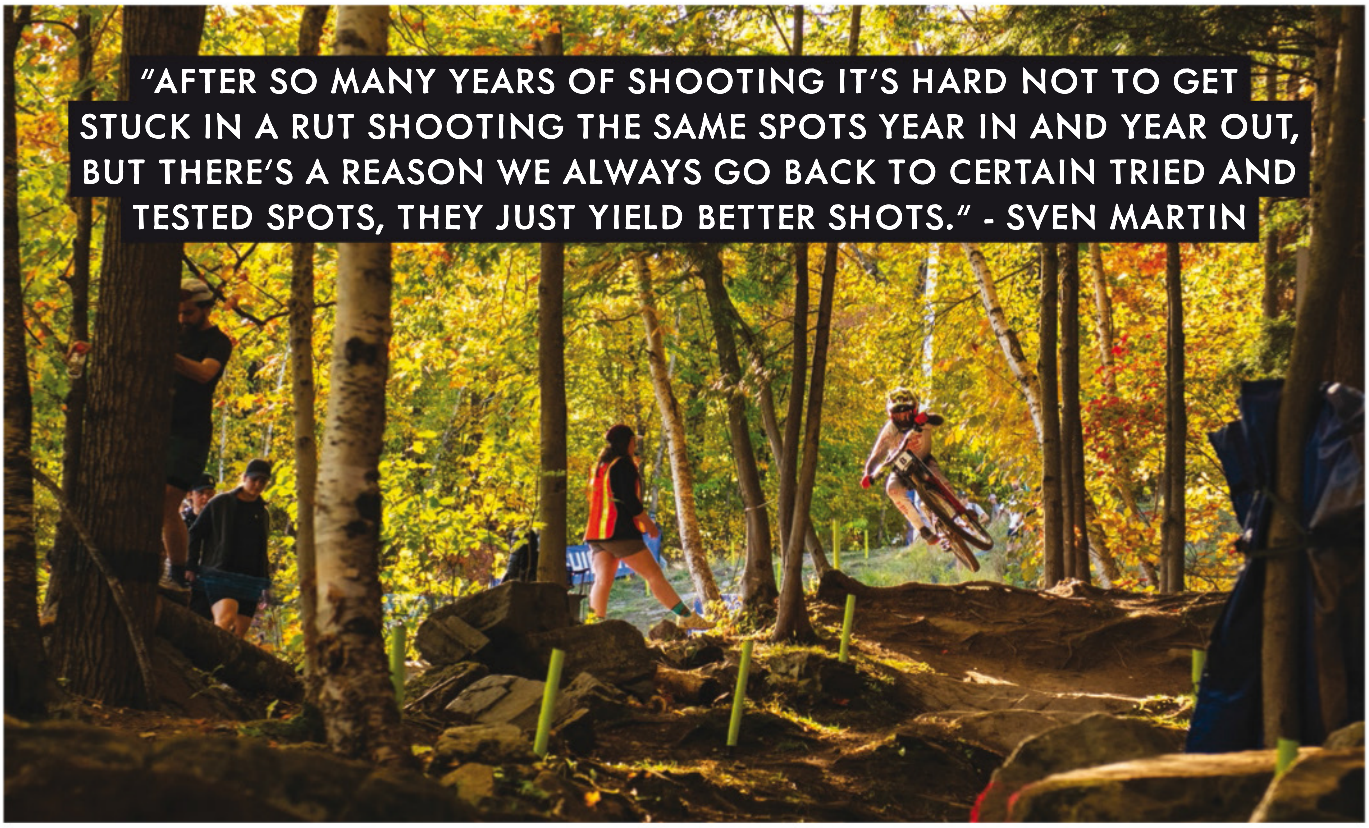
You keep seeing a group of photographers in the foreground, not exactly in front of the TV coverage but still there in front of the crowd scrambling around the forest. They aren't cheering or even watching the riding, but are glued to the back of a camera trying to capture all the action. These are the photographers in the B-zone, a special bunted off area between the race track and the spectators only accessible by team staff and media. Sometimes this area is small, sometimes it can be over 30m wide. It's a zone that requires special access in order to cover a World Cup as a photographer.

The photographers at the World Cup are a rare breed. They're the first ones up in the morning prowling the pits in search of new bike tech or a rider getting warmed up. They are also the last ones to bed at night, providing magazines, teams, riders and sponsors with precious imagery. A photographer will quite often work 15–20 hours every day at a World Cup.

The process of getting permission to photograph starts weeks before with the application process. Now that the whole series is run by Warner Bros./Discovery, it's a more fluid system than previous years. You need to register as a photographer through the Warner Bros. media website, then each individual World Cup round requires a letter of employment from a team/magazine/newspaper etc, and proof of previous work or a membership to the International Sports Press Association (without an office in Australia this is very difficult to obtain). From there you have to wait a few days for approval. It's a very polished system that ensures only professionals get access to the coveted B-zone.

Success! The next step is to visit the Media Centre on site at the event to obtain your media pass and photo bib (each colour has different access that I'll run through later). You need to wear the bib at

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS AT WORLD CUPS ARE A RARE BREED, THEY'RE THE FIRST ONES UP IN THE MORNING AND THE LAST ONES TO BED AT NIGHT, QUITE OFTEN WORKING 15-20 HOURS EVERY DAY AT A WORLD CUP.



"AFTER SO MANY YEARS OF SHOOTING IT'S HARD NOT TO GET STUCK IN A RUT SHOOTING THE SAME SPOTS YEAR IN AND YEAR OUT, BUT THERE'S A REASON WE ALWAYS GO BACK TO CERTAIN TRIED AND TESTED SPOTS, THEY JUST YIELD BETTER SHOTS." - SVEN MARTIN

all times and have access to your pass to get on the gondola for free (at MSA the cheapest option lift pass was $29 per day for spectators). The media centre has a variety of free snacks and drinks, heaps of editing tables and free wifi. As this space is only available to accredited media it can be a sanctuary at times.

Now you're ready to shoot! There are a couple of basic rules to follow: don't get in front of the TV camera and shoot safely and avoid fall zones and high speed sections next to the race track when shooting from the B-zone. There are other rules but these are the big ones. They sound easy to manage but once you get out there it can be pretty overwhelming.

There are many different ways to photograph a World Cup. Nowadays there are more photographers, videographers and phone videographers than ever trackside looking to shoot one specific team only. I met multiple people using tracking apps (like an app you'd use for lost luggage on an international flight) to keep tabs on where the team members are at all times: kind of creepy, and not ideal in bad phone service areas, but it seemed to be a popular option.

Others have 2-way radio, so staff at the top of the hill can let the photographers know when a specific rider is coming. This system has been around for ages and still works really well. It's nice to be around a few photographers to know these kind of details but as an individual working for a magazine, I pretty much shoot everyone I can. Sure, I specifically needed to capture our fast Aussies for publication purposes, but when you're trackside at these events every rider is one of the best in the world and it's kind of hard to just watch them ride by. I love to try and tell a story about the week and I believe that the best photographers in the business also operate like this.

At MSA, the B-zone had good media access this year in both the DH and the XCO. Sometimes I felt bad for the spectators who are often held 10m (or more) away from the action, but I will say this makes my job a lot easier. I'm also very thankful to be just a few centimeters away from the best mountain bikers in the world to capture the unique angles that you don't get to see on TV.

The camaraderie of the photographers in the B-zone is evident. I've been shooting off and on at World Cups since 2017 and am always welcomed back by the full-timers with smiles and nods. I joked this year with the likes of Sven Martin and Andy Vathis that my season was just beginning as theirs was ending. Sven was quick to say he was looking forward to his next 6 months off...

Arguably the most famous photographer on the hill, Martin operates on a different level from most. He's been covering World Cups full-time since 2008 after a short career racing at DH at the World Cup. "After so many years of shooting it's hard not to get stuck in a rut shooting the same spots year in and year out, but there's a reason we always go back to certain tried and tested spots, they just yield better

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The TX6165 is GMEs newest 5-watt Handheld UHF CB radio. New, class-leading features such as the large, high-contrast LCD display, 2-watt speaker, and a user-programable button make it stand out from the field.

The TX6165 features 5/1-watt switchable transmission power, VOX hands-free mode, a built-in LED torch, and up to 30 hours of battery life.

Also featuring rugged IP67 Ingress Protection and MIL-STD810G ratings, the TX6165 is built tough for outstanding performance and years of reliable use in the harshest Australian environments, making them perfect for those who need rugged and reliable UHF CB communication, for work or play.

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shots," Sven said. "That's not to say you just revert to an old formula, you're always looking for new points of view and continually monitor the changing light, evolving track conditions and weather and move accordingly. I absolutely love terrible weather. The heavier the rain and worse the mud, the happier I am; you get different shots."

Or, instead of mud, you can shoot a World Cup in the peak autumn conditions of MSA in 2024. I've never had more fun in my life than shooting than on DH practice day. The dirt was perfect and the autumn colours were out of this world. Watching the best in the world puzzle out lines and just enjoying the trail– which was almost unanimously named track of the year by riders, fans and photographers alike – was pure joy.

When it finally came to race day, it was important to know which colour bib can go where, so I made sure to scout out these locations at the start/finish lines prior to avoid the chaos of the crowds. At an XCO, only the TV cameras and photographers with red bibs (denoting full season media and those with multiple clients) are allowed inside the finish corral, whereas the yellow photo bibs (me) and green team bibs are allowed behind the barriers, or further behind the athlete exit pathway (about 30m behind the red bibs). After the top five riders cross the line, all media are able to mingle with the athletes to snap finish corral photographs: being allowed such close proximity to the athletes is probably the best perk of the media bibs, and one that everyone respects greatly. All the photographers are ducking and weaving to try and capture the story of the race, while quietly apologising to the photographers beside them for bumping or moving into their frame. It's a wild experience the first time, and it still is for me after shooting 10 World Cups.

For DH, we once were able to jump into the finish corral after the final competitor crossed the line, but sadly the new organisation has gotten rid of this access. It is one of the only changes to media access that I've noticed, in fact I think access for media is better than it ever has been. Considering that to watch the event live on TV costs a fair amount of money now, it's more important than ever for trackside photographers to create as much media as possible and keep the sport growing. I was pleasantly surprised by how smoothly everything ran on the ground.

I caught up with Josh Carlson who just finished his last professional mountain bike race at the E-Enduro World Championships in Italy and works as a host and field reporter for Warner Bros., covering the Whoop UCI MTB World Series. Just seconds before he was whisked away to go live on TV he said "being on the other side of the fence on the microphone is pretty cool, I get to expose a few more stories, I can give insight into the riders and teams. It's a learning curve to say the very least. It's a huge company, Warner Bro.s is massive and they have some humongous plans so it's a privilege to be a part of that."

He's right, the scale of the events are bigger than ever and the amount of effort that goes into making TV coverage as good as it can be was pretty eye-opening to see first hand. Now that they have 2 of the 10 contracted years under their belt I can see that it's just going to get bigger and better. Hopefully the streaming service in Australia can keep up with it.

THE HEAVIER THE RAIN AND WORSE THE MUD, THE HAPPIER I AM: YOU GET DIFFERENT SHOTS." - SVEN MARTIN

10

creation SIGNS
70
50

“IT’S LIKE BEING A PRIVATEER ON THE BIKE, YOU JUST TURN UP, BATTLE ON AND EVENTUALLY MORE AND MORE PEOPLE GET TO KNOW YOU AND IT SORT OF STARTS TO CLICK.” - PIPER ALBRECHT

Being a photographer in the B-zone at a World Cup is hard; not only do you consistently have to produce fantastic work, you also have to compete with other photographers for the right to be there. I can say that it parallels World Cup athletes quite well, you have your established ‘big dogs’ like Loic Bruni and Sven Martin who will basically always be there if they want to be. Then you have your privateers who are just breaking through to become professional like Zoe Cuthbert and Piper Albrecht.

Piper has found his rhythm at events after two full-time seasons, and believes World Cup photography is a viable career path. “It’s like a slow burn, this year I’ve seen money that stays in my bank, I can save money from travelling the world doing this,” he explains. “Looking back I can see that my photography has levelled up in the last couple of years. More people in the industry have seen my work, and I meet more people leading to getting more clients to shoot for.”

After travelling to Brazil at the start of this season off his own back, people in the industry started noticing Piper and now at the end of the season he’s making video content for Specialized Factory Racing. “It’s like being a privateer on the bike, you just turn up, battle on and eventually more and more people get to know you and it sort of starts to click” he explains. “It’s taken a while. I love being at the events, having a job and a purpose, it’s nice to see people stoked on my work. Although I hate the late nights.”

From one AMB Photographer of the Year to another I can say I wholeheartedly agree!

So next time you see a trackside photographer at your local race, don’t hassle them for photos. Perhaps buy them a coffee instead and thank them for trying to keep the mountain bike world growing. It’s a hard life but we love it!

Cheers,
Matt Rousu

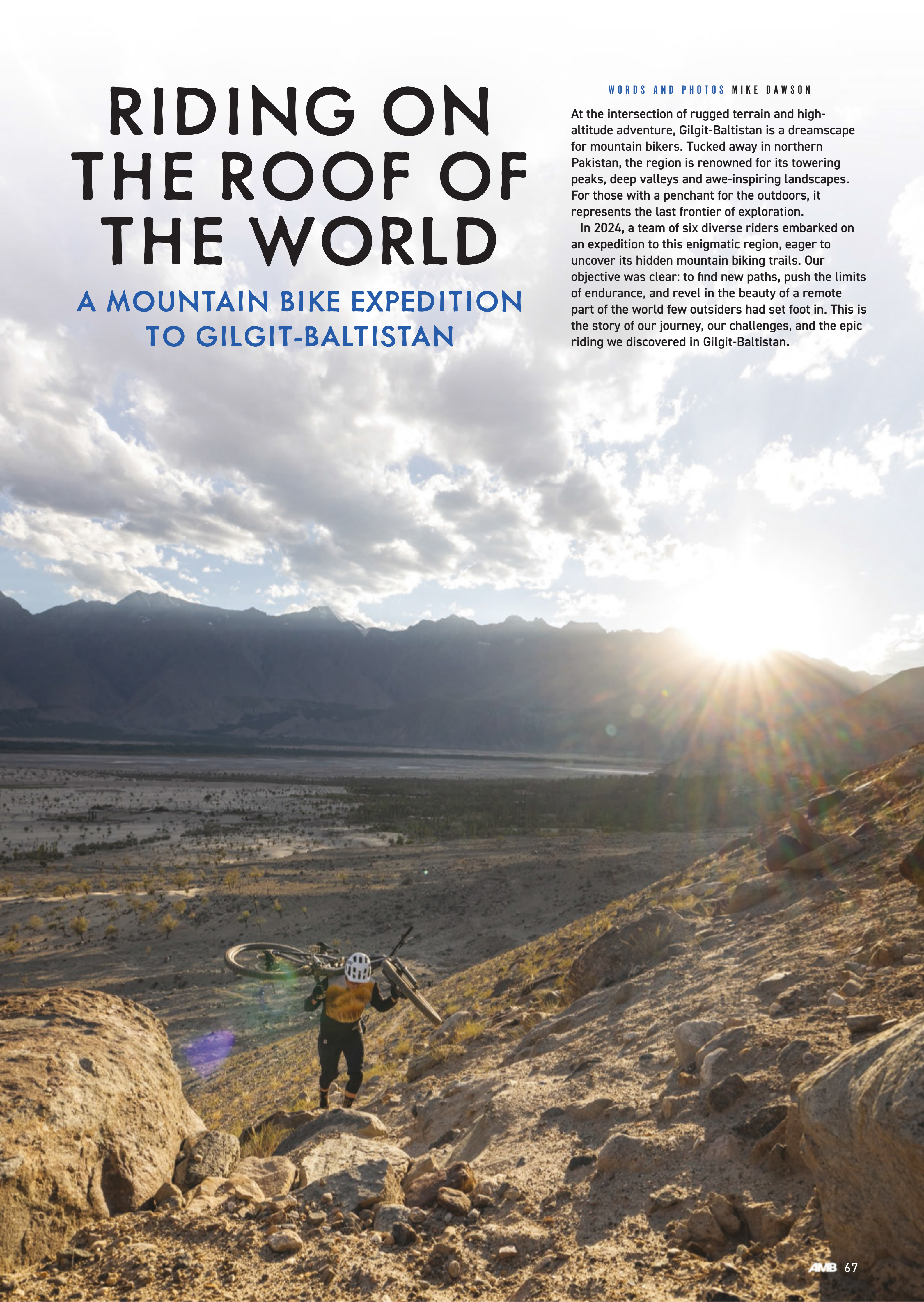
RIDING ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

A MOUNTAIN BIKE EXPEDITION TO GILGIT-BALTISTAN

WORDS AND PHOTOS **MIKE DAWSON**

At the intersection of rugged terrain and high-altitude adventure, Gilgit-Baltistan is a dreamscape for mountain bikers. Tucked away in northern Pakistan, the region is renowned for its towering peaks, deep valleys and awe-inspiring landscapes. For those with a penchant for the outdoors, it represents the last frontier of exploration.

In 2024, a team of six diverse riders embarked on an expedition to this enigmatic region, eager to uncover its hidden mountain biking trails. Our objective was clear: to find new paths, push the limits of endurance, and revel in the beauty of a remote part of the world few outsiders had set foot in. This is the story of our journey, our challenges, and the epic riding we discovered in Gilgit-Baltistan.



THE JOURNEY BEGINS

It was early, and the cold was biting. We were camped high in the Karakorum Mountains in northern Pakistan, and no one had gotten much sleep. Our unacclimatised bodies were struggling to breathe at high altitude. A night spent battling headaches, tight stomachs, and general discomfort had already shown us how tough this journey would be. But there we were, a team of six riders, on the first day of an ambitious expedition to uncover the hidden mountain biking potential of Pakistan.

This was not a trip to ride through the familiar landscapes of Rotorua or the remote mountains of New Zealand. No, we were in the heart of Gilgit-Baltistan, a place few, if any, riders have ventured. It was a dream destination for anyone passionate about adventure, a region known for its breathtaking beauty, towering peaks, and rugged terrain. Little did we know that our search for trails would become more than just a riding experience — it would transform into an exploration of culture, community, and the unexplored beauty of Pakistan's northern reaches.

THE TEAM

Our expedition team consisted of a motley crew of seasoned professionals, adventurers, and newcomers to the high mountains. Our collective knowledge of biking spans continents, disciplines, and decades, making for a dynamic and interesting mix of skills.

Jamie Garrod – Known as the mastermind behind New Zealand Mountain Biking, Jamie is a professional guide with years of experience leading riders through some of the most beautiful (and challenging) trails in the world. His passion for guiding and his deep knowledge of terrain and safety were invaluable on this trip.

Matt Miller – Founder of Brake Ace, an innovative riding company, Matt brought his technical expertise and a flair for discovering new bike technologies. His insights into bike setup and performance were crucial, especially given the varying conditions we encountered at high altitudes.

Jeff Carter – A trail builder with decades of experience, Jeff is as much at home with a shovel as he is with a bike. He's built trails around the globe and has ridden almost every corner of the world. His contribution to this expedition was invaluable, not only in terms of trail expertise but also in finding riding lines that made the most of the terrain.

Adam Kadervak – Our filmer and documentarian, Adam's job was to capture every breathtaking moment of the expedition. Equipped with state-of-the-art cameras and drones, he turned our rides into cinematic experiences. His ability to get the perfect shot – while keeping pace with riders at high altitudes – was truly impressive.

Rosie Clarke – A local rider from Rotorua, Rosie was on the lookout for an adventure that would push her limits. A skilled rider with a love for exploration, she added energy and enthusiasm to the team. It was her first experience in such extreme environments, and watching her tackle these trails was a highlight of the trip.

Mike Dawson – A relative newcomer to adventure mountain biking, joining the mastermind Jamie, to plan this expedition to explore the altitude, terrain, and the sheer beauty of the surroundings.

WHY PAKISTAN?

The idea to ride in Pakistan first came about in a somewhat unconventional way. After a quick ride around Whakarewarewa Forest, the seeds of the expedition were planted.

Over a couple of beers, the team began discussing the idea of exploring part of the world that's entirely new to cycling. It was Mike who first pitched the idea, "what if we could explore the trails of northern Pakistan?" Jamie needed little convincing and from there the crew grew.

For most people, Pakistan's name conjures images of remote mountains, steep peaks, and vast, untamed wilderness – combined with geopolitics, war and terrorism. It seemed like the perfect setting for an adventure.

Our goal was simple: fly to northern Pakistan and explore the hidden trails. We didn't know exactly what we'd find, but the prospect of discovering a new frontier was irresistible. Pakistan isn't typically the first place you think of when it comes to mountain biking adventures. However, this was exactly what intrigued us; an area bordering the mighty Himalaya and the Karakoram Ranges.

We knew that remote regions like these held untapped potential, and we felt the time was right to discover what might be hidden in those high-altitude valleys. It took months of planning, countless emails, and an immense amount of research to get everything in motion. We reached out to local guides, secured the necessary permits, and began working to ensure that we had everything needed for a safe and successful journey. What began as a casual conversation in a Rotorua pub was now an all-in adventure, and we were ready to embark on what promised to be the experience of a lifetime.

EMBARKING TO SKARDU

Flying into Skardu this all became a little more real. Skardu Airport, perched in a narrow valley, provided the perfect gateway to one of the most remote and stunning regions on Earth. Disembarking the plane in the small but bustling town, nestled at the foot of some of the highest peaks on the planet, takes your breath away.

Jagged peaks – many of them over 7,000 meters – rise from the earth like ancient sentinels watching over the land.

We quickly settled in and were greeted by local people with warmth and curiosity. The hospitality of the people here would define our entire journey, from our first meal to our last ride. After some quick adjustments to the bikes, we were ready to embark on the real adventure.

Our team of six was already feeling the weight of the journey, the anticipation of the days ahead merging with the fatigue of hours spent on planes from New Zealand. Before we hit the trails, there was a challenge to be faced: getting our bikes from Skardu to the heart of the mountains. The solution, as it turned out, came in the form of two old Toyota Hilux trucks.

There was no luxury of bike racks. Garrod, leader of the team, glanced at the two trucks. "We'll need to figure out how to get these bikes around," he said, squinting at the bed of the first Hilux, “they're not exactly big." The Hiluxes were in surprisingly good mechanical condition for their age, though their beds were lined with scratches and dents from years of hard use.

Miller was the first to come up with an idea, “what if we buy some sleeping pads and carpet?” Kadervak, the documentary filmmaker and a man of few words, nodded in agreement. He was keen to get moving, but equally committed to documenting every moment. Moments later, with the bikes hanging on the back, we headed out along the Indus River, towards the mountains and adventure.

The road was a chaotic mixture of dust, rocks, and unpredictable terrain. The Hiluxes, despite their age and weathered appearance, performed perfectly. The drivers swerved between trucks, bikes and cars, all in between phone calls and social media checks. As we darted through narrow mountain paths the crew was experiencing differing degrees of nervousness. The bikes, nestled in the back, seemed to hold their breath with every sharp turn and jolt.

Despite many close calls both bikes and riders survived.

DAY ONE: THE TREK TO FAIRY MEADOWS

Fairy Meadows is perhaps the most known tourist spot of North Pakistan. A lush, green plateau that sits at the base of Nanga Parbat, the ninth-highest mountain in the world. While it's known for its trekking routes, few have explored it on two wheels. The plan was simple; ride the well-known trekking route and see what we could uncover. The logic was that years of hiking may have worn a ridable descent into the hillside.

Crossing the Indus River in the baking afternoon sun, we arrived at the base of the Fairy Meadows, on the edge of the Karakorum Highway. It was a scene of absolute chaos. Our vehicles weren't able to navigate the treacherous road that climbs steeply from the valley floor. With daunting 1000m sheer drops and little margin for error we

had to recruit local transport. After haggling with local drivers for 2 hours a price was set and bikes were loaded. As the sun set we headed off into the remote regions.

By late afternoon, the landscape unfolded before us in breathtaking beauty as we climbed up into the highlands. The trucks had done their job, and the sun hung low over the rugged peaks of the Karakoram, casting long shadows across the rough, dusty roads. We were left with our bikes at a wash out – days of rain had washed away a section of road. We had to make our way around it by foot, trying not to look 500ft down into the river below and wonder 'what if…'.

We continued on foot up the Fairy Meadows track in the dark. It was a relentless test of willpower, we were hungry and tired. With only our headlamps casting narrow beams of light, we stumbled over loose rocks and jagged roots, the steep trail snaking upwards over uneven terrain. The weight of our mountain bikes, slung over our shoulders or pushed by the handlebars, made each step feel heavier. The air was thin, our breath shallow, and the cold bit through every layer of clothing. The sound of our boots crunching on the gravel was the only rhythm as we pushed on. The higher we climbed, the more the altitude drained us, our bodies unaccustomed to the thin mountain air. But there was no turning back. We pushed on, driven by the promise of the pristine Fairy Meadows, the warmth of a bed and a Pakistani dinner waiting at the top.

As the sun rose the following morning, we awoke to a magnificent site. On the skyline the dramatic peak of Nanga Parbet created a stunning scene, a falling glacier making its way down the valley. We ate breakfast was in the most scenic of spots, then headed further upwards, pushing our bikes to the high view point before dropping into the descent.

The ride was epic. Natural endless flow combined with large boulders creating rock features. We whooped and hollored on the descent, enjoying the natural features. The challenge of the terrain was real and the beauty was unmatched. Along the way, we crossed streams, passed through small villages, and navigated steep, rocky sections that tested both our physical endurance and technical skills.

By the time we arrived back at Fairy Meadows, we were all fatigued but exhilarated. The sunset view at Nanga Parbat was nothing short of spectacular. Its snow-capped peak loomed majestically above us, towering over the lush meadows below. We spent the evening setting up camp, resting, and soaking in the surreal atmosphere as the sun set on another insane Pakistani day.

Over 2500 metres of descent to the Indus Valley floor awaited us. We set off early the following morning. Steep sections of exposed trail combined with flow, tech and all round fun. This descent felt like the perfect combination of discovery riding. Exposure created nervousness and speed was kept in check.

Each rider was in their element — whether it was Jamie making technical maneuvers look effortless, Matt pushing the limits of his bike setup, or Rosie conquering a steep section. Skidding into the carpark, high fives were thrown around like candy, before the waiting Hiluxes were loaded up and headed for the next descent.

RAKAPOSHI BASE CAMP

In my opinion, no trip to northern Pakistan would be complete without experiencing the majestic beauty of Rakaposhi Peak. Rakaposhi, standing at 7788m, is the 27th highest mountain in the world. Its beauty is almost surreal. We spent several days in the area, scouting trails and exploring the surrounding valleys before landing on the ridgelines of Rakaposhi as our primary objective. Towering over the upper Honza Valley, we all thought this section of trail would be what we had come to Pakistan for. The surrounding landscape is rugged. Snow covers the upper slopes, glaciers cascade downward and rivers flow steeply towards the valley floor.

The climb was tough. It was hot; again the sun beat down on us as we began to ascend out of the valley up a steep path. The team had found its rhythm. We had traversed, explored and played around in enough of the area to know what was ahead of us and were starting to formulate a picture of the trails that could be built here.

The team was tired. Matt Miller was struggling, the Pakistani cuisine had got him. Rough guts and the resulting dehydration had sapped the energy out of him. When you added the intense heat into the mix, it made for a tough day, but after a perfectly timed drink stop for a cold NEXT Cola at a shack enroute, he was back on track and ready for the lure of the peaks ahead.

The rugged terrain on the ascent was giving us a taste of what we were in for on our descent. We were now nearing altitudes above 4000m and the lack of oxygen was beginning to take its toll. Every step felt like an effort, combined with the heavy loads on our shoulders with overnight gear, bike and equipment. The speed was slow at best.

We were weary of altitude sickness and we adjusted our pace to ensure we didn't push too hard. As we neared the base camp, the sheer size and scale of Rakaposhi was overwhelming. At the final corner before the basecamp (our destination for the night) we were greeted with a spectacular sight. The giant glacier flowed from the highest slopes right past the camp. The beauty of the place was unfathomable. The region felt wild and untamed, and the serenity of the mountains was almost otherworldly. At this point, it wasn't just about riding, it was about feeling the raw power of nature and embracing the unknown.

The elation of the team was contagious. Sitting in an area so unique – big mountains, miles from home and a realisation that we were sitting at the top of a trail and that the entire descent was ridable. The steeps were managable, linked together with endless flow, built over years of foot traffic and weather. Better still, the higher moisture content in the area meant more shrubs, trees and hero dirt leading to for maximum-grip.

There was no denying that we had found exactly what we were looking for: an unknown trail, primed for riding. Built by nature. The potential for new lines was endless, and we were eager to see what else the land had to offer. In the afternoon, Adam got his cameras out to document the beauty of the trails, the landscapes, and our journey. He captured us riding through forests, across alpine meadows, and along rocky ridgelines, all while the backdrop of snow-capped peaks remained a constant reminder of how remote and wild this place truly was.

At dawn we awoke and dragged our bikes up for sunrise over the

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Rakaposhi Glacier. Jamie attempted to ride the rocky and exposed ridgeline before returning to camp for a hearty breakfast of fried eggs, tea and chapati – a breakfast of champions. From there it was all systems.

Descending from the alpine meadow camp the way we had climbed meant 1500m of descent over 10km of singletrack passing through alpine scree, alpine meadows, steep rocky exposed sections, and wooded rooty areas. The crew rode section after section regrouping for a short break before setting off at pace.

After 2 hours of playfully making our descent we arrived at the Honza River filled with stoke.

A NEW FRONTIER FOR MOUNTAIN BIKING

Our expedition to Gilgit-Baltistan was nothing short of epic. From the bustling streets of Skardu to the serene landscapes of Fairy Meadows and the awe-inspiring Rakaposhi Base Camp, we experienced a part of the world few have had the privilege to explore on a mountain bike. The region's potential for mountain biking is immense, offering riders the chance to not only experience a stunningly remote landscape but to push physical and mental limits in ways that few places can provide. As we flew back from Skardu, exhausted but invigorated, I couldn't help but reflect on how transformative the trip had been. For all of us, this expedition was about more than just riding bikes, it was about discovering new challenges, new places and connecting with a landscape that is as wild as it is beautiful while exploring the unknown.

For those looking for the ultimate adventure in mountain biking, Gilgit-Baltistan is a place that should be on every rider's radar. The trails are waiting and the mountains are calling. One of the most pleasant surprises of the trip was the incredible local support we received. Pakistan's northern regions, despite their remoteness, have a vibrant local community that is incredibly welcoming to travelers. Our guides, cooks, and logistics teams were not only highly skilled but deeply passionate about their land. They provided everything we needed to succeed, from navigating the rugged terrain to keeping our spirits high in the face of adversity.

The connection between the locals and the land was evident. Many of the people we met had lived their entire lives in the shadow of these majestic peaks, and they treated the mountains with reverence and respect. As mountain bikers, it was humbling to see how closely they coexisted with the natural world, and it made the experience even more enriching. It also reminded us of the importance of local knowledge, which proved invaluable in finding trails that were otherwise invisible to the untrained eye.

The riding potential in northern Pakistan was beyond anything we could have imagined. Gilgit-Baltistan, with its high-altitude deserts, alpine meadows, and towering mountains, offers some of the most unique and challenging riding opportunities in the world. The region is still relatively untapped by mountain bikers, but its rugged terrain offers endless possibilities for new lines and trails.

CULTURE AND SAFETY IN PAKISTAN

Contrary to what many might believe, Pakistan is a country full of rich culture, history, and hospitality. The locals, particularly in the northern regions, were incredibly welcoming and eager to share their lives and stories with us. We were often invited into homes for tea or food, and the kindness we received was humbling. Despite being in a relatively remote area, there was always a sense of safety, with the local people watching over us as we navigated the trails.

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GLOVE GROUP TEST

TESTERS OSCAR MENZIES, CALLUM MURRAY, ANNA BECK

Wearing mountain bike gloves is more than just a matter of comfort — it's essential for safety, performance, and protection. Whether you're navigating technical trails, racing down fast descents, or tackling rough terrain, gloves provide a buffer between your hands and the bike, reducing the risk of injury if you find yourself unexpectedly acquainted with the ground, while enhancing grip and control.

Not quite sure if you want to wear gloves? Take it from me, you do. I once crashed and impaled my palm with rail ballast at National Champs (riding to the coffee shop after course practice, nonetheless) causing a puncture wound that needed surgical repair. Cue a two day stay at Tasmania's finest general hospital and no racing for me. Ouch.

Needless to say, at AMB we believe that gloves are an essential part of your riding kit.

This glove test can help you select the best offering regardless of ride style and weather. Featuring 6 of the hottest brands and 30 different models and colourways, our three dedicated mountain bikers put these gloves to task on everything from big days on the chairlift to 100km backcountry epics.

PROTECTION AND SAFETY

The most obvious benefit of mountain biking gloves is the protection they offer. Falls are an unfortunate reality of biking, especially on challenging trails. A good pair of gloves helps prevent abrasions from rocks, branches, or the ground during a spill, and even a lightweight glove can mean the difference between hand trauma and riding away from a crash without injury. Additionally, some gloves on test featured padding and impact protection as some extra security when hitting up extra sketchy terrain.

GRIP AND CONTROL

Gloves improve your grip on the handlebars, ensuring your hands don't slip when your palms sweat or when conditions get wet. This grip can make all the difference in maintaining control over your bike; particularly in technical situations, wet weather, or while navigating steep descents. Many of the gloves on test feature silicone or textured materials on the palms or fingers to enhance grip on bars and levers.

SIZING, COMFORT AND FIT

A proper fit is crucial when selecting mountain bike gloves. Too tight, and they'll cut off circulation or cause discomfort. Too loose and they might bunch up, affecting grip and control and causing blisters. For a glove to perform at its best, it should fit snugly without restricting movement. As most gloves on test were true to size, fit is mainly mentioned in reviews when it differs from the norm.

CONSTRUCTION

The materials used in mountain biking gloves vary depending on the type of riding. All-purpose mountain bike glove uppers are typically made from breathable, moisture-wicking fabrics such as synthetic meshes or lightweight stretch materials. These fabrics keep hands cool and dry during intense rides. Leather – or more commonly synthetic leather – palms and reinforced areas are often added for durability, while mesh or spandex are often used to add flexibility in the finger gussets.

Most gloves on test feature touch-screen compatible fingertips, allowing riders to use smartphones without removing their gloves, which is ideal for quick trail photos or checking maps. We also tested several colder-weather and hot-weather gloves, featuring specific fabrics to tackle the elements.

Mountain bike gloves usually have either a hook-and-loop strap or an elasticised pull-on wrist cuff. The hook-and-loop (or velcro wrist tab) closure allows for a more customisable, snug fit, preventing the gloves from slipping during a ride. Elasticised wrist cuffs, on the other hand, offer a more seamless and comfortable feel but may not provide as much adjustment as velcro straps.

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100% is a performance-driven brand known for its innovative approach to mountain bike goggles, glasses and gloves. Their range of mountain bike gloves combines cutting-edge materials, superior craftsmanship, and a focus on comfort and durability. From lightweight gloves for cross-country riders to rugged, full-finger designs for downhill enthusiasts, the 100% range of gloves are engineered to enhance performance and withstand the toughest trails.

100% SLING

$49.99
Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Black, Grey, Navy

The 100% Sling glove is targeted at the rider prioritising gloves that are ultra-lightweight with a minimalist feel and protection. They feature a perforated single layer 'cool skin' palm, mesh finger gussets, laser perforations and four-way stretch fabric on the upper for superior breathability. Everything about these gloves screams 'hot weather riding' to me, and they are a great fit for cross country, trail and gravel adventures.

The Sling allows for sensitive contact with the bike due to the unpadded palm, but as an ultra-lightweight option this means they don't add much dampening.

The Sling features added durability with the addition of thicker tactile fabric attached to the base of the palm that allows the rider to glove-up easily. Though they are super minimalist, we have had no issues with tearing or excessive wear in the wash, though we haven't tested these on a dirt nap yet.

Just remember to apply sunscreen on your hands before riding with Sling gloves. Otherwise, you'll end up with some red spots on your hands from the laser-cut perforations. The Sling gloves are also available in a short-fingered version, if that's your jam. -AB

100% RIDECAMP GLOVE

$39.95
Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Navy, Black, Green, Yallow, Re

The 100% Ridecamp is designed as an everyday go-to glove with some protection and grip. They feature a slip-on cuff for a secure fit, a durable interwoven fabric on the upper for flexibility and comfort, stretch finger gussets for improved mobility, silicone printing on the palm and fingers for enhanced grip and touch-screen-compatible fingertips for convenience. To me, these gloves are great for all-round riding conditions in moderate temperatures, and are a great fit for trail, enduro, and downhill riders.

Being a slip-on glove, they are really easy to throw on and not worry about the possibility of the velcro tabs failing, as experienced with others on test.

Having a good construction that isn't too basic nor fancy, 100% definitely enhanced durability of the Ridecamp by incorporating a thicker, textured fabric at the base of the palm, making it easier for riders to put the gloves on. While the Ridecamp are thinner gloves, we've encountered no problems with tearing or excess wear after riding or washing, although we've kept it rubber side down, so they haven't hit the dirt yet.

The 100% Ridecamp glove is perfect for the trail rider who enjoys a full-finger basic glove. For trail, enduro, and downhill riders doing laps and wanting that extra hand protection, the Ridecamp glove is for you. -OM

100% **COGNITO D30**

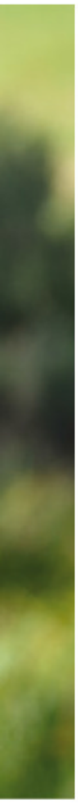
RRP: $59.99
Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Green, Black, Orange, Red, Yellow

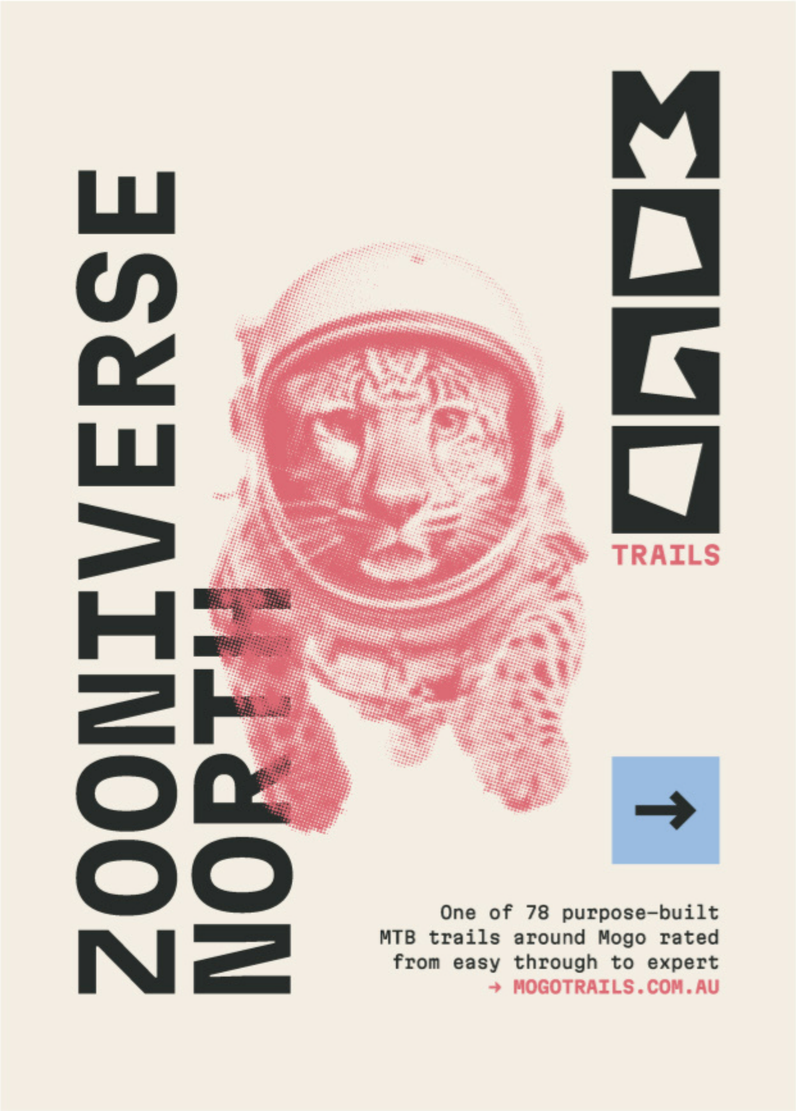
The 100% Cognito is a strong, sturdy glove that can withstand the heavy force of a crash. The glove consists of robust material, including D30 impact protection in the knuckle and ventilated leather for the underside of the glove.

The sizing of the 100% Cognito aligns with standard sizing, I usually wear between a small and medium men's size glove and found that the medium Cognito has about 0.5cm of growing room in the fingertips causing a bit of excess material to bunch leading to friction under the palm. The wrist strap has a wide range of adjustment and can fit a much thicker wrist than mine, though I have very small wrists!

The 100% Cognito glove is made of thick material, so they can heat up in warmer weather. The extra padding and form-fitting impact protection covering the vulnerable areas keeps them safe and saves your hands and knuckles in the case of a gnarly crash, though I did find them less comfortable than the Fox Defend D30, which is a similar style of glove. The Cognito's protection can hinder the glove's overall dexterity, and some riders may prefer to use SendHit hand guards for similar protection on rough and loose descents.

The sturdy material that forms the glove is durable under cold weather conditions, also making it perfect for enduro or downhill racing. The 100% Cognito is the perfect glove for a rider looking for a sturdy, heavy-duty glove that has protection that can withstand an 'OTB'. It also offers a reasonable price for anyone looking for well-priced gloves with added protection. -CM

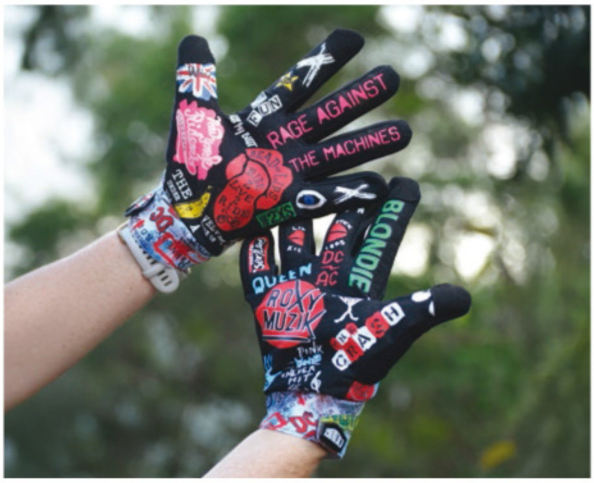




CYCOLOGY

cycologygear.com

Cycology is a Sydney-based brand known for their wild designs, and their mountain bike gloves did not disappoint. Cycology makes all-purpose mountain bike gloves and a winter glove. Their range is available in sizes XS–XL, and Cycology has a fit tool on their website if you're unsure of sizing.



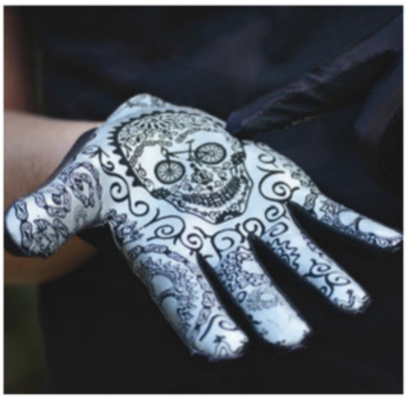
DAY OF THE LIVING MOUNTAIN BIKE GLOVE

$44.95
Sizes: XS, S, M, L, XL
Colours: Multiple designs

Cycology's products are each named after their unique designs, and as such I tested the Day of the Living glove, which references Dia Des Los Muertos (known as the Day of the Dead) holiday in Mexico. A calavera – or skull – is adorned on the glove's upper in a nod to Mexican design. Cycology always manages to weave bike concepts into their products, and the Day of the Living gloves cleverly hide pedals, bikes and chains into the artwork.

They also feature a full silicone palm, the only brand on test to do so. The upper is thin and lightweight and the finger gussets lined with mesh for extra ventilation. With a reinforced velcro wrist strap, they feature slightly more wrist coverage than most others on test, which helps with reducing any mountain biker watch tan. Design is just one factor, though, so how do they ride?

The Day of the Living gloves are a great all-round glove that perform reasonably well in hot weather, albeit with more arty flair than most. -AB



ROCK N ROLL WINTER GLOVES

$49.95
Sizes: XS, S, M, L, XL
Colours: Multiple designs

Do you like music *and* riding in the cold? Well do I have a glove for you! The Cycology Rock n Roll winter glove is a budget-friendly cold weather option that's sure to add a little bit of rock and roll vibrancy to your riding wardrobe.

Similar in construction to the Day of the Living glove, this glove is built with a neoprene upper and light fleece inner for warmth and wind resistance. Of note is that the winter gloves feel a little larger on hand than Cycology's mountain bike gloves, so sizing down is a great idea if between sizes.

Once again Cycology use a full grip palm that references the Velvet Underground, Rage Against the Machine and The Who, which is a sentence I never thought would make it into a mountain bike magazine, but there's a first for everything!

These are great cold-weather gloves at a solid price. If you prefer slightly less chaos on your hands, Cycology do make (slightly) more conservative options. -AB

FOX RACING

foxracing.com.au

Fox Racing, often simply known as Fox, is a legendary brand in the world of extreme sports, particularly mountain biking. Dating back to 1974, Fox is renowned for its innovative designs and high-performance gear, from protective equipment to apparel. The brand has become synonymous with durability, style, and cutting-edge technology, serving riders who demand the best in both functionality and comfort. Fox Racing's commitment to quality and performance has made it a favorite among professional and amateur mountain bikers alike, making their products a staple in the industry – especially their exceptional range of gloves. We dive deep into their range below.

FOX **FLEXAIR GLOVE**

$59.99
Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Pink, Yellow, Plum, Black, Maroon, Bone, Grey

The Fox Flexair glove is targeted towards cross-country, trail, and enduro riders seeking lightweight performance and superior control. It features a minimalist design with a reinforced palm for added durability, silicone grip details for enhanced grip control, and breathable stretch mesh for maximum comfort in warmer weather. The thin palm ensures excellent tactile sensitivity, making it an ideal choice for riders riding and tackling technical terrain without sacrificing precision, comfort, and durability.

The gloves run true to their listed size and are genuinely comfortable for the rider who likes having full-finger gloves with some grip, but ultimately prefers a lightweight, minimalist glove. As a slip-on glove, they are easy to don without worrying about a velcro tab delaminating, or sticking to your washing.

Despite the Flexair's minimalist design, they do offer solid added durability. A thicker, tactile fabric at the base of the palm enhances grip and makes it easy to put on. These gloves managed to resist wear and tear throughout the test period, ensuring reliable performance through washes and rigorous use.

The Fox Flexair is designed for riders who value a lightweight, minimalist feel combined with excellent grip and breathability. The Flexair is also offered in a large range of colours, including a grey/black fade (tested), meaning there is a Flexair colourway to match every outfit.

These gloves keep your hands cool and comfortable even in the heat, making them suitable for a range of disciplines. With their sleek design, durability, and performance, the Flexair offers reasonable value for its price, making it a reliable choice for any rider. -OM

FOX **FLEXAIR GLOVE 50 YR**

$79.99

The Fox Flexair 50 YR Anniversary edition is tailored for trail, enduro, and downhill riders seeking high performance with a nod to Fox's 50-year legacy. Combining a lightweight, minimalist design with a durable, slip-on cuff, touchscreen compatibility, it offers excellent grip through pre-curved fingers for an ultimate riding position and superb comfort with breathable stretch leather mesh. The thin palm enhances tactile sensitivity, making it ideal for riders tackling technical terrain while appreciating heritage-inspired styling.

The 50th Limited Edition gloves differ from the Flexair base range, with a premium leather palm, limited edition black and green colours, low-profile neoprene cuff, and pre-curved fingers that enhance bar feel and comfort.

The leather palm offers more comfort and compliance, while providing exceptional grip, comfort, and resilience. Designed to withstand rigorous abuse, the glove's reinforced stitching and abrasion-resistant fabric ensure lasting performance for demanding riding. Despite a more lightweight design, these gloves resist wear and tear through the testing period, ensuring reliable performance through washes and rigorous use – although I haven't tested these with a touchdown (yet).

The Fox Flexair 50 YR is designed for riders who value a lightweight, minimalist feel combined with excellent grip and breathability as well as a glove that helps represent a legacy. Perfect for all mountain biking, these gloves keep your hands cool and comfortable. With their sleek design, leather palm, and durability, the 50-year legacy glove is a more premium offering from Fox, perfect for the discerning mountain biker -OM

FOX **DEFEND GLOVE**

$79.99
Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Black, Green, Graphite, Grey, Cream, Ash

The Fox Defend is one of my favourites on test. It is designed for riders looking for a quality glove made up of soft, lightweight material that still has protection in the event of a crash.

These gloves are aimed at riders seeking durable protection that can handle the impact of a crash. They feature tough materials, including knuckle padding and ventilated leather on the palm side for added comfort and resilience.

I found that the medium size still gives me a small amount of give for comfort, without causing bunching and friction underneath the palm. With an adjustable wrist strap the glove fits a range of wrist sizes.

This glove's high-quality soft and forgiving material makes for a comfortable grip. The light-coloured cream upper makes the Defend a great hot weather glove, and I never felt overly sweaty wearing these. A wrist strap and little rubber dots covering the backhand provides aesthetic value and a little bit of extra protection. The dexterity of the Fox Defend glove enabled me to still use my phone effortlessly.

The Defend gloves stand up well to abuse: they easily survived long, intensive days at Thredbo riding non-stop for descent after descent and I am confident that these gloves would provide excellent protection during a crash.

The Fox Defend gloves sit in the mid-price range for modern day gloves and are ideal for riders who prefer a lightweight glove for hot summer riding that can still provide protection during a crash, without full knuckle reinforcement. -CM

FOX **DEFEND D30 GLOVE**

RRP: $84.99
Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Green, Black, Grey

The Fox Defend D30 is a heavy-duty glove that withstands substantial impacts while also providing some warmth and temperature regulation in cooler conditions. The key feature of the Defend D30 is the D30 impact padding around the knuckle to provide extra protection when tackling janky and treacherous terrain. While not a cold-weather glove, the strong ripstop cordura and neoprene material covering the upper means that the Defend D30 are a great option for technical riding in mild or colder climates.

These gloves run slightly on the firmer, or smaller, end of sizing. Despite the extra bulk of the protective material and knuckle, I found these gloves to offer a great balance of comfort and protection. Comparing these gloves to the 100% Cognito, the Defend D30 has a slimmer profile and slightly smaller protection across the knuckles, which I personally found to be more comfortable.

This is in part because the padding and impact protection covering the knuckles is segmented, allowing for more flexibility. The knuckle protection isn't annoying or distracting when climbing or noodling around on tamer trails, but still provides additional protection when in a big crash when riding huge features on a downhill track (and these gloves did some crash testing!).

Overall, The Fox Defend D30 is a strong and durable glove that offers great protection to a trail, enduro and downhill mountain biker: a brilliant glove that certainly does the job. -CM

FOX **DEFEND PRO FIRE GLOVE**

$89.99
Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Camo, Black

The Fox Defend Pro Fire are built for trail and enduro riders who demand high performance in cold-weather conditions. Featuring a premium low-profile design, index finger and thumb touchscreen compatibility, it includes a brushed fleece lining for warmth, an easy to put on slip-on cuff for a secure fit, and water-resistant materials to repel the elements. Reinforced durability ensures it withstands rugged use, while silicone grip details enhance control on technical rides. With added insulation and breathability, the Defend Pro Fire delivers a perfect balance of comfort, protection, and precision for winter mountain biking.

The gloves fit nicely according to their listed size. I usually fit between an L and an XL men's glove, and I found that with the Defend Pro Fire, it was a really good fit with my liking of wiggle room and some extra room around the cuff to pull on. The glove offers exceptional comfort with its insulated design, moisture-wicking fleece lining, and slim, ergonomic fit, ensuring warmth and dexterity during cold-weather rides. The longer cuff design works well with a rain jacket or long jersey, meaning no frozen wrists in winter.

The glove features rugged construction with durable materials, reinforced stitching, and weather-resistant properties, ensuring they withstand heavy abuse and harsh conditions while maintaining performance and protection. The suede palm allows for a great bar feel, while Fox have incorporated extensive touch-screen capability across all fingers; a nice touch.

The Fox Defend Pro Fire combines durability, warmth, and precision, making it an excellent choice for riders tackling harsh, cold-weather conditions. With its premium construction and reliable performance, it ensures comfort and protection for demanding adventures on the trail. -OM

FOX **DEFEND LO-PRO FIRE GLOVE**

$79.99
Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Black

The Fox Defend Lo-Pro Fire is perfect for trail and enduro riders facing cold-weather conditions. Designed with a low-profile fit, touchscreen compatibility, an easy to put on slip-on cuff, brushed fleece lining for warmth and water-resistant materials to shield against the elements, the Lo-Pro Fire features many of the qualities of the Defend Pro in a more slimline package. They feature a durable, water-repellant construction that stands up to rugged use, with silicone grip details providing superior control. Ideal for technical rides in colder climates, this glove balances warmth, performance, and protection for demanding adventures on the trail.

The gloves fit nicely according to their listed size. I found that the Fox Defend Lo-Pro Fire Glove offers exceptional comfort with their low-profile design, soft yet durable materials, and a snug, secure fit that minimises bulk, but there is a lack of dexterity due to the glove being on the thicker and heavier side. Unlike the Defend Pro Fire glove, the Lo-Pro Fire gloves are bulkier, with a shorter cuff and tab. I did find that the tab began to delaminate after several uses, as such I did prefer the Defend Pro and Ranger Water glove for inclement weather.

The Defend Lo-Pro Fire gloves offered reliable performance. Maintaining comfort, grip, and protection even under heavy abuse on challenging trails, with no issues of wear or tear, they're a solid winter glove for the mountain biker who rides in cold, challenging conditions. They effectively combine durability, comfort, and performance, and their (mostly) robust construction ensures long-lasting reliability, while enhancing grip and warmth for comfort, even when conditions are challenging. -OM

FOX **RANGER WATER GLOVE**

$64.99
Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Black, Graphite

The Fox Ranger Water Glove is Fox's premier waterproof glove. Key features include a durable, waterproof upper, extended cuff for coverage with a jacket or long-sleeved jersey, fleece interior, a silicone grip on the palm for control, and index finger and thumb touch-screen compatibility. They offer comfort, dexterity, and reliable performance; ideal for riders tackling rainy, cold or muddy trails.

The gloves run true to their listed size, and they're comfortable and warm in wet conditions. The silicon grip and a pull-on design was a personal favourite for ease of donning, and they featured extensive touch screen capability; very handy when trying to text someone in the middle of a storm!

The gloves use durable materials and reinforced stitching. Designed for rugged use, they withstand heavy abuse, providing reliable performance in wet conditions. The gloves are really quite comfortable, and is slightly more streamlined than the Defend Lo-Pro and Defend Pro Fire gloves on test. Their lightweight, flexible construction, a snug yet breathable fit, and a soft interior lining ensures all-day wearability while maintaining excellent grip and protection in wet conditions.

The Fox Ranger Water is perfect for the rider who likes to go out no matter the condition and expects excellent durability and comfort, all while being waterproof. Designed for mountain biking, providing weather resistance and durability to handle wet and rugged trail conditions. -OM

FOX **RANGER FIRE GLOVE** AND **WOMEN'S RANGER FIRE GLOVE**

$59.99
Women's sizes: S, M, L
Men's sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Black, Graphite, Ash

The Fox Ranger Fire is designed for mountain bikers who ride in cold, wet conditions. They feature a weather-resistant construction with a brushed fleece lining for warmth, a water-resistant outer layer, touchscreen compatibility, an easy to put on extended slip-on cuff for a secure fit, and silicone grip details for added control. The Ranger Fire glove balances durability, comfort, and insulation, making it perfect for winter rides on technical terrain.

The gloves run true to their listed size and are genuinely comfortable and warm in wet conditions. The extended cuff and water-resistant and dirt-resistant upper makes them a great all-round pick.

Throughout testing I found the Ranger Fire to have exceptional durability and comfort. Built with tough, flexible materials, reinforced stitching, and abrasion-resistant panels, they endure harsh conditions and washing without wear. Despite their thickness, they maintain reliable performance. They do suffer with a bit of reduced dexterity from the bulk, but despite that would be a glove of choice for early morning winter rides in all conditions.

AMB editor, Anna, also tested out a pair of the Women's Ranger Fire gloves, agreeing that they were a sturdy and durable design for cooler months. As a more slimline glove than the Defend range, these would be her go-to winter gloves for most conditions. -OM, AB

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FOX **RANGER GLOVE GEL**

$49.99
Sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Purple, Cream, Black, Moss

FOX **RANGER WOMEN'S GEL SHORT-FINGERED GLOVE**

$39.99
Women's sizes: S, M, L
Men's sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Black

The Fox Ranger Glove Gel is Fox's best-selling all-purpose mountain bike glove. The Ranger Gel's key feature is gel-padded palms, a welcome relief for those requiring extra comfort or shock absorption on rough terrain. In addition to this, they are lightweight and breathable, with touchscreen compatibility and a secure fit with a tab closure.

The gloves run true to their listed size and I found that they offered exceptional comfort with strategically placed gel padding to absorb shocks and vibrations, relieving pain for those suffering from neuropathy of the hand. The breathable fabric keeps your hands cool, and a flexible design allowing a snug yet unrestricted fit for all-day riding.

The glove sports a rugged upper for durability, offering a minimal amount of stretch across the hand. These gloves stood up to repeated abuse during the test period, offering reliable performance, reinforced stitching, and gel padding for comfort even during long rides on challenging terrain. I tested several of Fox's Ranger line of gloves, and found that while the overall construction is tough and durable, the hook and loop closure (aka wrist tab) tended to delaminate after a few washes. Sure, you could probably fix this with a bit of superglue, but we would love to see Fox stitch the length of the tab (as brands such as Fist have done) to prevent this occurring.

For riders dabbling in gravel or road disciplines, or simply preferring the feel of a short-fingered glove, the Fox Ranger Gel glove is also available in a short-fingered glove, with tester Anna riding with these on longgravel rides. She found that the padding really assisted when on a gravel bike, the lack of suspension causing vibration that leads to dead arms and numb hands. For those looking for some extra comfort on long rides, a gel glove can assist with reducing nerve pain and fatigue from vibrations.

The Fox Ranger in both short and full finger options, combines comfort, durability, and versatility, making it an excellent choice for mountain bikers of all levels looking for a more comfortable ride. -OM

FOX **RANGER GLOVE** AND FOX **RANGER WOMEN'S GLOVE**

$39.99
Men's sizes: S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Women›s sizes: S, M, L
Colours: Ash, Black, Blue, Green, Mustard, Graphite, Grey, Orange, Indigo

Fox Ranger gloves are similar in concept to the 100% Ridecamp: once again a reliable, no-frills design. With a sturdy upper, thumb sweat wipe and touchscreen compatibility, these are Fox's everyday gloves for most conditions.

Having had a pair of old Fox Ranger gloves hanging around in my cupboard for years, I can attest that the construction of the upper and palm is rugged and durable, the only quibble once again being the durability of the hook and loop closure.

That being said, as an inexpensive option that stands up to abuse, the Ranger is a staple option to have in your wardrobe.
-AB

FIST

fisthandwear.com.au

Fist Gloves is a rider-driven brand renowned for its high-performance motocross, mountain bike, and BMX gloves. Fist focuses on blending style, comfort, and durability, creating gloves that are as functional as they are eye-catching. With bold designs and innovative features, the brand quickly gained a loyal following among riders who demand both performance and individuality. All Fist adult gloves are available in sizes 2XS – 2XL, I tested a size small in the (unisex) Fist products.

FIST **STOCKER**

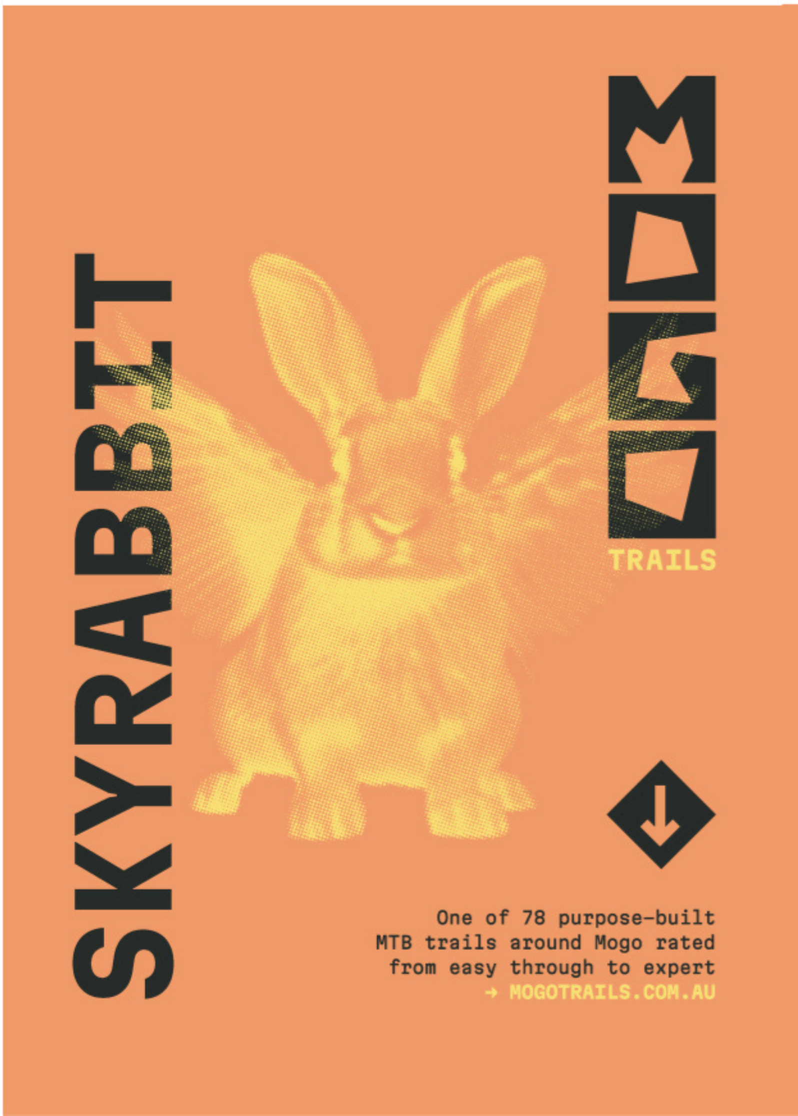
$44.95
Sizes available: 2XS, XS, S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Multiple

The Fist Stocker represents Fist's allround performer, with a minimalistic and lightweight design for maximum performance and feel.

I tested the Stocker in fluoro pink, blue and panda colourways. The fit was true to size, with a robust 4-way stretch twill spandex upper. A synthetic leather (clarino) palm allowed maximum contact with the bars without the addition of extra padding. The Stocker also features lycra finger gussets which allows a greater range of finger movement compared to many others on the test. The wrist itself is constructed from tough lycra with FIST's hook and loop closure, meaning the glove is able to be worn by a range of differing sized wrists.

Testing the Fist Stocker gloves, it readily became apparent just how quickly they slid into our everyday use rotation. Without too many bells and whistles, they are a solid performer for everyday rides in moderate temperatures. The only qualm? I did find that the touchscreen conductive finger and thumb wasn't the most effective touchscreen solution on test

I've had a pair of Fist gloves in my closet for around 10 years, and they still get put up to the task on occasion, so I daresay the Fist Stocker is a great option looking for a long lasting workhorse. For cold or very hot conditions I'd be a specific cool or warm weather glove, but for all disciplines, most of the time I'd be happy to rely on the Fist Stocker. -AB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FIST **COLD WEATHER GLOVE**

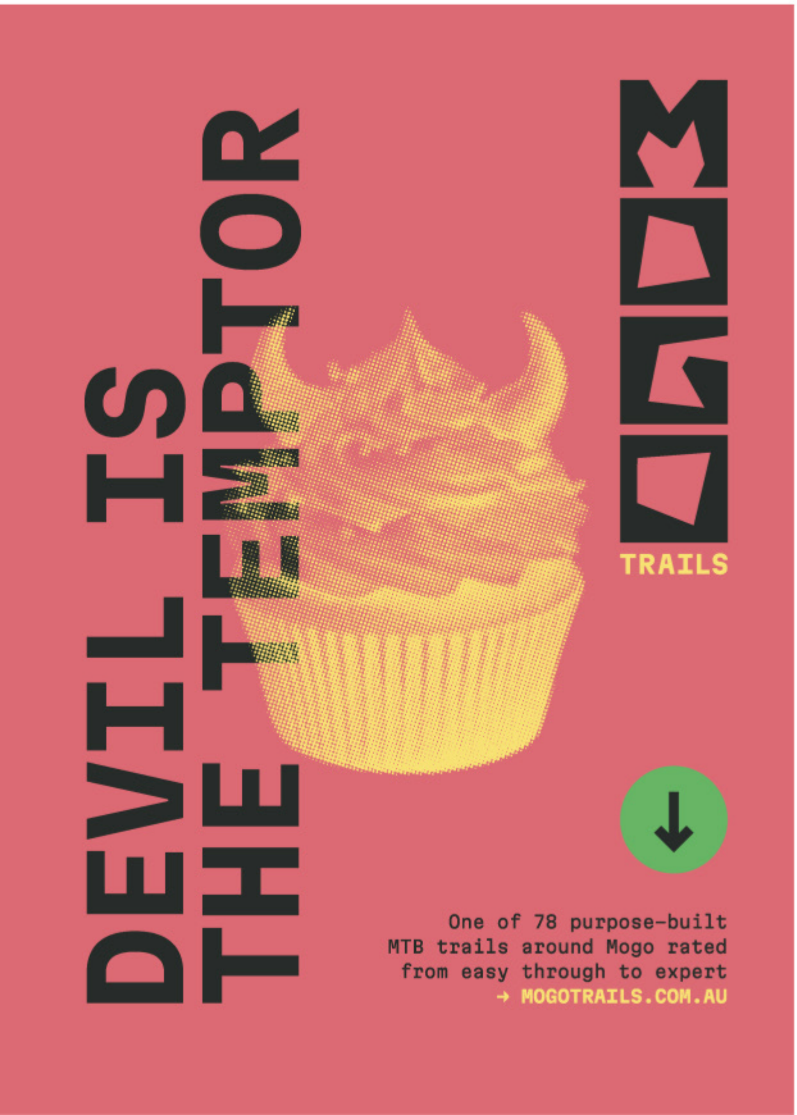
$44.95
Sizes available: 2XS, XS, S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Black, multiple artwork designs

It's not quite been the weather for the Fist Snowflake Frosty cold weather gloves in Southeast Queensland...yet. We tested these riding mainly indoors and early mornings before the sun got too intense.

The fit is as per other Fist on test, and slipping them on they mirror the feel of their Stocker gloves. However, Fist have used a 3 layer, sublimated weather resistant and thermo-wind blocking upper in their cold weather glove range. The palm is once again constructed of clarino, and the glove features the same lycra wrist, FIST closure system and touchscreen conductive finger and thumb that's seen across their range.

Despite being a cold weather glove, they retain the feel of an all-purpose glove. Unlike some of the heavier winter options on test, the Fist cold weather glove manages to provide warmth while retaining flexibility and dexterity. This is likely because they don't offer the same level of warmth as, for example, the Fox Ranger Fire or Defend Pro Fire. As a result, these represent a great option for cooler – though not cold – weather. Think Brisbane winter, or the shoulder seasons of the southern states. If you're in Tasmania this may represent a great summer glove!

-AB



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FIST **BLACKEDOUT BREEZER HOT WEATHER GLOVE**

$44.95
Sizes available: 2XS, XS, S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Multiple artwork designs

The Fist Breezer is the brand's hot-weather option, and described as 'super stealth and breezy' by the brand. With an ultra-lite mesh upper, Fist again uses the synthetic leather Clarino on the palm, which is perforated for extra air flow. Unlike the 4-way stretch twill of the Stocker glove, the Breezer uses a stretch mesh for extra breathability in hot conditions.

I enjoyed these as a hot weather option, though I'm not one to specifically get very hot hands in regular gloves. Just remember, as with most mesh gloves on test, that UV tends to penetrate lightweight mesh, so ensure to slip-slop-slap your hands before your ride. -AB

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FIST **CHAPTER 2025 FLAMINGO ATTACK**

$44.95
Sizes available: 2XS, XS, S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Chapter series features multiple artwork designs

Fist's yearly season drops (their chapter range) are perhaps the main reason for the brand's visibility: wild, bright and crazy designs that disrupt the neutral hues and black gloves that dominate the market.

I tested out the Flamingo Attack colourway, featuring pink flamingos shooting lasers from their eyes, punctuated with small martini glasses. Of course...because why not?

These vibes are exactly the sort of chaos that's needed within cycling. With a comfortable fit, in part thanks to the stretchy finger gussets also seen in the Stocker range, the Flamingo Attack glove features a spandex twill upper, differing slightly from the thicker upper of the Stocker series. Fist's fully patterned glove uppers all feature this slightly stretchier material, which is still very comfortable and durable.

With touchscreen capability, stitched wrist tab, and extra palm design that mirrors the upper, the Chapter series of gloves are a great way to inject a little bit of jazz into your ride.

Flamingos aren't your vibe? Check out their amazing range on the website. From Yeah Bears to T-Rex's and even Dachshund designs, Fist have designs ranging from mild to mildly unhinged to suit everyone's preference. -AB

FIST **CHAPTER 2025 SAM HILL GOAT**

$44.95
Sizes available: 2XS, XS, S, M, L, XL, 2XL
Colours: Chapter series features multiple artwork designs

Fist isn't just known for crazy designs, they're also renowned for partnering with mountain biking and BMX icons. The likes of Saya Sakakibara, Caroline Buchanan and Sam Hill have partnered with Fist to bring their own designs to life.

I tested the Sam Hill GOAT glove, a black and white design on the upper depicting a skeleton in a full face seemingly pinning it down a hill. The upper of this design is the same as the Stocker, a slightly firmer twill fabric, with the skeleton design printed onto the upper.

The GOAT features a rubberised 'Sam Hill' across the palm for extra bar grip, as well as the rainbow stripes across the fingers. These gloves are definitely more in the badass category than the flamingos with lasers and martinis, but goes to show that Fist have gloves for you, whatever your preferred tipple. -AB

KENNY RACING

Kenny Racing is a brand of BMX and mountain bike attire and protection designed and made in Amiens, France. If there's one thing that the French do well, it's throw a bike down a hill, and so we tested two of their gloves, the Race and Gravity models.

Kenny racing features a different numerical sizing system from other gloves on test, and as a size small I tested both a 7 and 8, preferring the larger size in the Race glove (with a slip on wrist) and 7 in the Gravity (with a hook and loop wrist tab). Kenny Racing offers gloves sized from 7 – 13, roughly an XS – 2XL.

KENNY **RACING GLOVES - RACING**

$44.95
Sizes: 7 –13
Colours: Black, White

Kenny's Racing glove is a lightweight, unpadded glove for optimum bar-feel. With an ultralight Clarino palm, an ultra-light and ventilated upper, silicone 'topo' design on fingers for lever grip and a reinforced thumb, they're a fantastic glove for those racing or riding in hot weather.

The slip-on design is aided by a stretch gusset on the wrist, so I never had to wrangle the gloves on or off, but it did require me pull firmly on each finger to loosen and remove the gloves.

The simple construction ticks all the boxes for a summer glove, however I did find the reinforcement around the thumb to be less comfortable if riding in a drop-bar position on the gravel bike. This is a great option as a stylish, minimalist summer trail glove for those who value direct contact with the bar. -AB

KENNY **RACING GLOVES – GRAVITY**

$59.95
Sizes: 7 –13
Colours: Black, Red, Teal

Usually when a product is labelled as a 'gravity' offering it means it comes with a bit of extra beef in construction, or perhaps integrated protection.

Kenny Racing's Gravity glove bucks the trend, instead offering a minimalist mesh upper and a simple unpadded palm for ventilation in hot conditions that makes for a sensitive connection to the bars. Compared to the Racing gloves, Kenny's Gravity gloves feature an even more lightweight upper, making this a glove of choice for hot and humid conditions.

The Gravity gloves use a velcro closure system on the wrist that also features a silicone grip on the end of the tab for better grip. I loved that the tab is reinforced with stitching, avoiding issues with delamination in the wash. These are a fabulous option for summer riding across all mountain biking disciplines. -AB

LEATT

mtb.leatt.com.au

Leatt is a pioneering brand in the world of mountain biking, known for its focus on safety and performance. Leatt has revolutionised rider protection with cutting-edge designs. Leatt's range of gloves reflects this commitment, blending advanced materials, durability, and comfort. I tested out the MTB GripR 1.0 women's gloves and the slightly burlier 2.0 X-Flow gloves.

LEATT **MTB 2.0 X-FLOW**

$69.00
Sizes: S, M, L, XL
Colours: Grey, Blue, Black, Tropical

The Leatt MTB 2.0 X-Flow glove marries up a lightweight all purpose glove with some added protection for technical riding in moderate and hot temperatures. With a nanogrip palm that allows for grip in wet and dry conditions, these gloves offer a secure fit, lightweight X-Flow mesh, touchscreen compatibility and a 3D brush guard for pinky and knuckle protection.

While the protection isn't as robust as the 100% Cognito or Fox Defend D30, the brush guard of the 2.0 X-Flow offers a little more protection in high impact areas across the knuckle and pinky.

A simple design with a standard fit, the 2.0 X-Flow glove is a fabulous option for riders in warm climates that want a little extra protection without the bulk of reinforced knuckles. -AB

LEATT MTB GRIPR 1.0 WOMEN

$59.00
Sizes: XS, S, M, L

The Leatt GripR 1.0 Women's glove is a lightweight summer glove that sports design features such as Leatt's own Micron-Grip palms, and FormFit finger stitching for comfort and performance in wet or dry conditions.

Throughout the glove testing period, I did find myself reaching for the GripR 1.0. Not only are they a cool purple/orange colourway, the fit was just right and the soft palm really delivered in all conditions. As an ultralight glove, they don't offer extra protection, but did have all the requisite 'nice to have' features such as touch screen compatibility, sweat wiper, silicone gripper and plastic-free packaging.

These gloves are a slip-on style with a reinforced cuff, and despite being on high rotation have worn reasonably well considering their lightweight construction. A great option for warmer weather and those seeking a glove without a hook and loop closure system. -AB

GLOVE ROUNDUP

Through our team's extensive testing phase, we have identified the gloves that really stood out in their specific application.

BEST LIGHTWEIGHT GLOVE

100% **SLING**

The 100% sling was an ultra lightweight option that delivered a near-naked feel for sensitivity and comfort. The perforated uppers made them a great option for warmer weather, just don't forget the sunscreen! All in all, a great option for a rider looking for a simple, durable lightweight glove for anything from cross country to enduro riding.

BEST PROTECTIVE GLOVE

FOX **DEFEND D30**

The Fox Defend D30 was one of several gloves on test that featured extra protection, and the Defend D30 stood out to our tester as the best balance between protection and comfort in this category. The longer cuff with an adjustable wrist strap allowed for a firm and secure fit, while the placement of the protective D30 on the knuckles didn't add any uncomfortable pressure points.

BEST ALL-ROUND GLOVE

FIST **STOCKER** AND **CHAPTER SERIES**

Deciding the best all-round glove winner was really difficult, as there were many options on test that offered great protection, comfort and durability for great all-round performance. In the end, the Fist Stocker and Chapter series took the crown, thanks to their durability and long-lasting performance, plus the range of colours and designs available.

BEST WET & COLD WEATHER GLOVE

FOX **RANGER FIRE**

Depending where you live, a pair of rain-resistant, cold weather gloves may be in your everyday wardrobe, or simply on standby for a few wintery months of the year. Regardless, they are an important addition to any mountain bikers kit, and the Fox Ranger Fire offered exceptional comfort and warmth without being excessively bulky. These are the gloves we would be reaching for on a cold and wet morning, and they are also one of the gloves on test offered in both men's and women's fits.

TESTED

There's a world of choice in bikes and bike parts out there. Our test team put bikes and products through the works.

95 Amflow PL Pro
100 Tern Orox
104 Wahoo Ace
107 Pure Recovery
108 Smith Forefront 2
110 Macride
114 Continental Tyres
116 Pro MSN 1.3 Saddle
118 SwitchGrade 2.0

THE HUB

The where, what, how and when of mountain biking, from industry professionals.

120 Skills
122 Nutrition
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126 Workshop

AMFLOW
PL PRO

TESTER **RYAN WALSCH** / PHOTOS **JORDAN RIDDLE**

CAN THE AMFLOW PL PRO AND NEW DJI AVINOX M1 MOTOR REALLY LIVE UP TO THE HYPE?

When news broke about the launch of Amflow bikes, featuring the new DJI Avinox M1 drive system, it seemed simply too good to be true. The numbers quoted were so far out of the ballpark that they seemed, surely, to be a marketing stitch-up at best. After all, leading e-bike motor manufacturers commonly feature a peak power of 600W, with many lightweight models sporting a peak power of 300W.

While even 300W is nothing to sneeze at for a long, steady effort, the DJI Avinox M1 claims a peak power output of 850W, and up to 1000+W in boost mode. Together with a huge 105Nm of torque (120Nm in boost), it's easy to see how early news of the Amflow and the DJI Avinox could be dismissed as fake news, but the hype is real.

This is undoubtedly the most powerful e-bike I have ever ridden, so come with me as we dive into an enigmatic industry disruptor; the Amflow PL Pro.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The Amflow PL's carbon frame weighs just 2.27kg, excluding the shock and hardware. This is incredibly impressive, especially considering the bike uses a tried-and-tested Horst link with a yoke-driven shock rather than flex stays. The bike comes set up with 160/150mm travel front and rear, with a Fox 36 Factory fork and Float X Factory rear shock smoothing the bumps. The Pro model has options with either a 600 or 800Wh battery.

Assembling our directly delivered Amflow PL Pro was simple and straightforward, thanks to thoughtful packaging. The only modifications we made from stock were a tubeless setup. The stock tyres have EXO+ casings but we found them a bit light for our trails, so I also added a Tannus tubeless insert in the rear wheel. Our PL Pro model came kitted out with SRAM XO Eagle AXS componentry excluding the cranks which are a DJI Avinox SL crank in 155mm in the two smaller sizes offered (medium and large) and 160mm in the two larger ones (extra large and extra extra large).

Amflow's own components also rounded out the cockpit, with a 800mm, 25mm rise Amflow carbon handlebar, Amflow grips and their own 35mm stem. Amflow carbon rims and alloy hubs also make an appearance, adorned with Maxxis Assegai/Dissector front/rear tyre combination, a solid choice for trail riding. A size-specific Fox Transfer seatpost with an Ergon SM Pro saddle finishes the build, with the medium frame speccing a 150mm length dropper (up to 210mm for the XXL size).

Once assembled, when looking at the Amflow PL from the drive side of the bike, there's little indication of the hidden powerhouse within. The DJI Avinox M1 motor is low-slung in the slender downtube, muting the massive 800Wh battery housed within. The Amflow PL's silhouette doesn't resemble that of a full-powered e-bike, nor does it resemble the current generation of lightweight e-bikes. Instead, its aesthetic blurs the lines between genres.

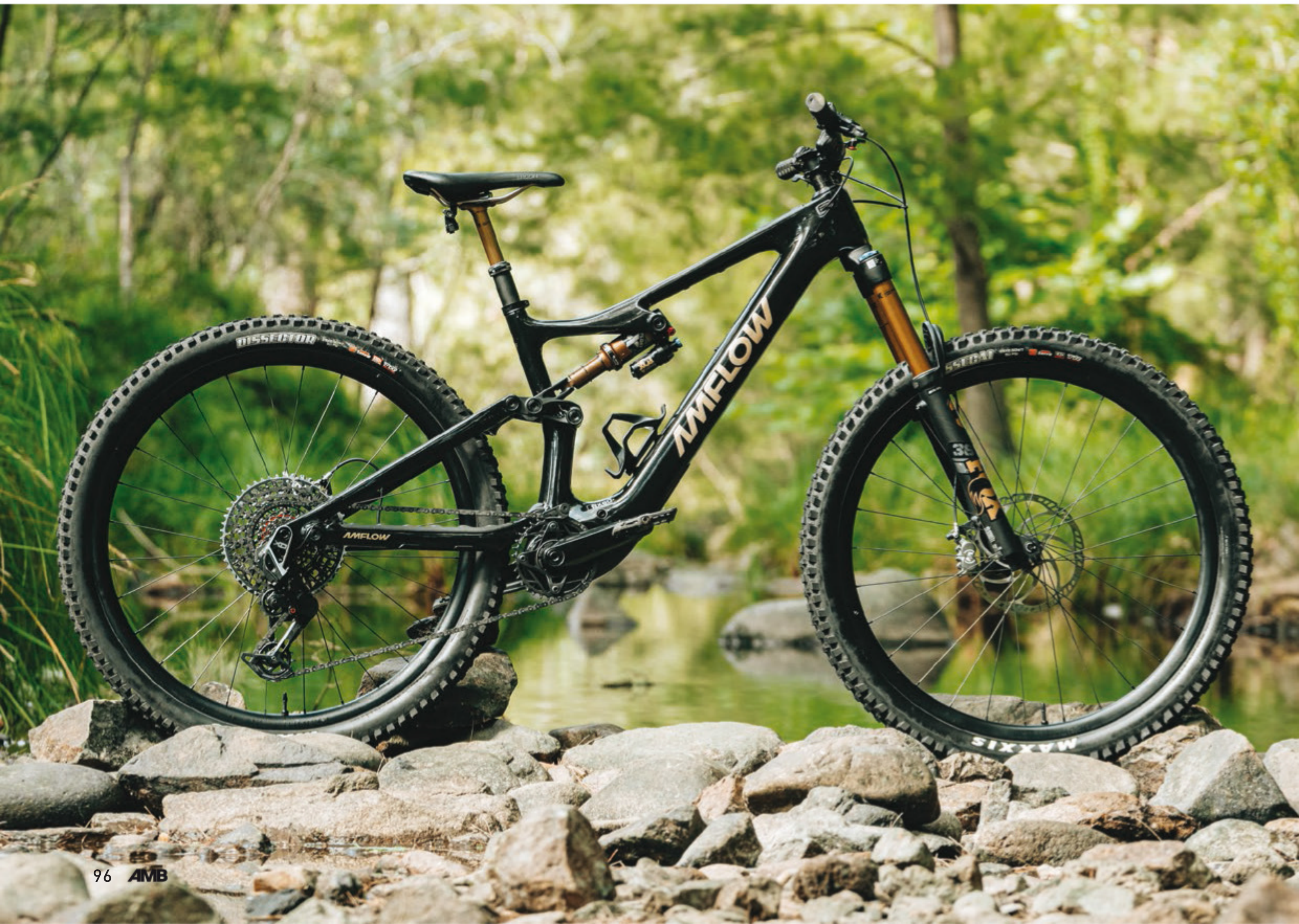
Perhaps this marks the start of the next generation of e-bikes? What we can be sure of is that the Amflow is something very special indeed.

Looking over the frame, I noticed plenty of well thoughtout features. The hardware is high quality, and the flip chip to change the bottom bracket height for 27.5" or 29" wheels is conveniently located on the yoke. But our favourite feature is the magnetic self-closing and self-sealing charge port. It's a sturdy clasp, reminiscent of other DJI products we use regularly, and something other motor manufacturers could take note of.

Within the Amflow's top tube lies the DJI Avinox system's 2-inch OLED touchscreen. This allows riders to easily access real-time riding data, including estimated range, and adjust settings with a simple tap. Riders can also use the two Bluetooth-enabled wireless controllers on either side of the handlebars to change modes while riding. These controllers can also be programmed to control other tasks, such as operating functions of a DJI Osmo Action 5 Pro camera.

There are five ride modes on the Avinox motor, including eco, trail, turbo, auto and a boost function that delivers over 1000W and 120Nm of power for a short 30-second duration. Throughout my time on the Amflow, I've come to appreciate the auto mode the most, but more on that later.

The Avinox M1 also features a built-in anti-theft mode. It includes a passcode, alarm, and push notifications to the rider if unauthorised movement is detected. The bike's location can be tracked via the owner's phone, which is seriously impressive. The alarm is loud enough to ensure no one ignores it.



Ryan Walsch

RIDING EXPERIENCE: Far too long racing, riding and developing products for all kinds of bikes.

GENERALLY RIDES: Pivot Firebird, Cervelo Aspero, Giant Propel

HEIGHT: 177cm

WEIGHT: 78kg

BIKE TEST TRACK: ANU Bike Park, Stromlo Forest Park, Poo Pines, Majura Pines

ON THE TRAIL

The Amflow PL Pro is incredibly quiet and rides naturally, with minimal resistance in eco, trail and auto mode. With the Avinox M1's claimed output, however, it's the turbo mode that I'm really excited to explore.

First impressions? This bike is a game-changer. The Avinox M1 motor offers a level of power, torque, and features that are far ahead of the competition. The figures quoted on Amflow's website feel conservative compared to the feel of its actual performance.

The Avinox motor features 850W peak power and 105Nm of torque, but torque exceeds 120Nm when engaging the boost function. This power surge lasts for 30 seconds and significantly boosts the already class-leading 850W peak power. Thankfully, Amflow equipped our size medium review bike with 155mm cranks, as the rate at which you cover terrain on a climb could result in hitting rocks and obstacles without that extra clearance.

Dialling in the correct sag is also crucial to reduce the chance of impacting rocks and debris as you haul up the climb at super-speed. For me, at 74kg I work with approximately 28% sag and an air pressure of 160psi. After the first ride, I either increase the pressure or add volume tokens.

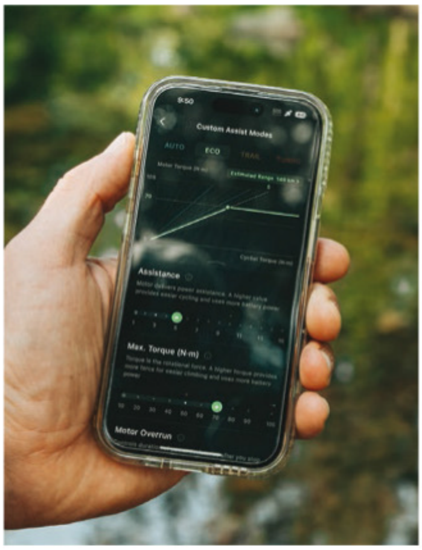
During our initial test, we felt the bump stop and lost the sag indicator (the o-ring off the body of the shock) multiple times. With 30% sag, the bike felt poppy and playful, but we may have gone a bit too deep — after all, we bent the cranks on the first run.

We launched a support chat via Amflow's website, sent a few photos of the issue and bike's serial number and we had a new crankset arrived the next day from Amflow's office in Melbourne.

The replacement cranks provided were an updated model with additional reinforcing material latticed on the back of the crankarm. This made for a stiffer and more robust arm to weather harsh conditions and terrain and I experienced great customer service from the team at Amflow.

Our medium demo PL Pro has 452mm reach and is the smallest of the four sizes. This is a slightly shorter reach than I am used to, but it is not too cramped in the cockpit to be able to reliably put the Amflow through its paces.

While the geometry is a little conservative



by today's standard, the PL Pro is a highly capable trail bike with a 64.5 degree head angle, dipping its toes into Enduro territory. The geometry can be compared with other major players in the trail bike industry, with very similar numbers on paper to the Specialized Stumpjumper 15. To complement this playful trail bike geometry, the Fox Factory Float X and Factory 36 perform flawlessly, highlighting how balanced the PL Pro is.

Quality components and a carbon frame mean that the bike is easily as light as the lightest SL range of e-bikes I have reviewed, while providing over twice the power of one...but this does lead me to one of my only criticisms with the handling, the Avinox motor is so powerful that you will find yourself entering sections of trail faster than you ever have, pushing the usually sure-footed trail bike well beyond trail-bike capability. If you're an aggressive rider considering the Amflow PL, adding more robust tyres and a stiffer handlebar may be a wise upgrade.

To combat this, I tweaked the support modes a little to manage the excessive speed in tighter singletrack by using the app, beefing up eco mode and turning down trail mode to a minimum. This meant we could keep the front end down in tight turns. But I found myself defaulting repeatedly to the Avinox M1's auto mode.

Positioned as a mode that lies between their eco and trail, auto mode gives between 200-400% assistance, automatically adjusting power delivery based on feedback to trail conditions. Using some fine-tuning via the Avinox App, I manually adjusted the auto mode to optimise clearing those features where you usually need to stomp hard on the pedals. Instead, auto mode allows me to easily ride these challenging sections with a gentle, natural assistance feel when cruising on a climb or traverse. Manually changing the assistance range to 7 – 9 (the assistance to 15) and capping torque at 80Nm brought the Amflow back into a sensible realm. It allowed me to conserve power and maintain traction. The torque certainly felt like more than the 80Nm advertised!

One of my favourite features of the Avinox system is the motor's overrun, or the duration of motor assistance after you stop pedalling. This feature has 4 settings ranging from a near instant shut off of power to what feels like a full second of power after you have stopped pedalling. The overrun is incredibly handy for getting up and over techy terrain, and I found it useful for popping off lips and features where typically you aren't able to pedal over. With some experimentation throughout the testing period, I found using the middle setting was my preference, allowing me to clear features with ease.

Unlike most other e-bikes that use a magnet for a speed sensor, the Avinox system uses a 42-point steel plate fixed to the rear rotor (much like an ABS system). It picks up what the wheel is doing seemingly instantaneously, resulting in the most natural-feeling motor I have ridden to date.

After my initial set-up adjustments, I eventually landed on 210psi and an additional token in the Fox Factory Float X, giving me closer to 25% sag and far more support feel with no obvious bottom out. To keep things balanced, the happy spot on the

Fox Factory 36 is 85psi and the addition of three tokens. These changes led to a more supportive ride on the PL Pro and helped tackle some of the gnarlier terrain that the DJI Avinox M1 motor begged us to play in.

In the end, I actually rang the editor to talk about how bonkers this bike is. Just nuts. No word of a lie, the power of the Amflow PL Pro made all other e-bikes I have tested feel like they were stuck in eco mode. Amflow's combination of an ultra lightweight frame, motor and component build combined with the pure brawn of the DJI Avinox M1 is an experience that simply defies written expression. In fact, the only downside is that the motor is so powerful that the Amflow PL Pro seeks bigger, chunkier terrain than perhaps the trail build is suited to.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Having been out and about on the Amflow PL for a few months now, I can confirm I've given it an absolute thrashing in order to uncover any possible issues. As an industry disruptor, the Amflow PL has significantly shaken up the e-bike market. Apart from some loose and creaking linkage hardware (requiring some cleaning), fresh grease, and tubeless tyre plugs and cranks, the Amflow PL Pro had dealt with the abuse admirably, redefining what I think an e-bike could or should be.

The Amflow PL Pro represents arguably the biggest advance in motor capability, weight and power in the e-bike world to date, but it's not just about brawn; the smarts and software driving the Avinox M1 are brilliant. With some tweaks to the support modes, I was able to drastically extend my riding range and optimise my ride experience. Changes I would make? Simply a few tweaks to the cockpit and consumables such as burlier tyres and a stiffer handlebar and crankset would make this bike a solid 'one bike to rule them all' contender.

We are very excited to see what is next from Amflow, how the rest of the e-bike industry responds, and what brands jump on the freight train of the DJI Avinox system. If you haven't yet experienced the Amflow PL Pro, you're missing out on what this new generation of e-bikes can do.

Essentials

RRP $13999

WEIGHT 20.05kg (as tested)

AVAILABLE SIZES Medium, Large, XLarge, XXLarge

FRAME MATERIAL Amflow PL Carbon, 150mm

FORK Fox 36 Factory, 160mm

SHOCK Fox Float X Factory

SHIFTERS SRAM AXS Pod

DERAILLEUR SRAM XO Eagle Transmission

CRANK DJI Avinox SL

CHAIN SRAM XO Eagle

CASSETTE SRAM Transmission 10–52T

HUBS Amflow, alloy

SPOKES Sapim E-light straightpull

RIMS Carbon, 29" tubeless ready

TYRES Maxxis Assegai/Dissector

BRAKES Mahgura MT7 Pro/203mm rotor

STEM Amflow Enduro, 35mm

HANDLEBARS Amflow Enduro carbon, 35mm rise, 800mm wide

SEATPOST Fox Transfer Factory

SADDLE Ergon SM Pro

www.amflowbikes.com/au

TERN OROX
BIKE REVIEW

TESTER **HAYDEN WRIGHT**

E-cargo bikes seem to be the hot new thing in the cycling industry, and for good reason. A category of bicycle once rarely seen on the road is now becoming a common sight on suburban bike paths where I live in South East Queensland. The availability and adaptation of pedal-assist motors to this category of bike are responsible for this seemingly sudden surge in popularity, transforming what was once a niche market into one that is now flourishing.

Multi-passenger capabilities and family car replacement are the most common selling points for most users, with many cargo bike owners – including myself – using them for daycare drop-offs, trips to the playground, and runs to the grocery store. You might be asking yourself why we here at AMB are reviewing a cargo bike, considering they usually have an off-road capacity akin to that of a lowered Toyota Hiace. That's because what I've had on test is something far more capable than the typical cargo bike – something that stands in stark contrast to the near-ubiquitous offering for those seeking a utilitarian bicycle for family adventures. Enter the Tern Orox.

It's safe to assume that most people reading this article are core mountain bikers and may not be familiar with the Tern brand, so here's the quick rundown. Founded in 2011, Tern primarily focuses on bicycles developed for the urban environment, including folding bikes, commuter bikes, and e-cargo bikes. The Orox is their first off-road-specific model designed to carry multiple passengers or up to 100kg of cargo. Whether it's kiddy joyrides, cargo-laden rail trail adventures, or overland touring with your trail bike in tow, the options are seemingly endless. Tern claims the Orox is a new kind of 'quiver killer' the likes of which we've never seen before.

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS

Based around an alloy frame, a rigid steel fork, and the Bosch CX Gen 4 drive unit, the Orox is available in two models and two wheel configurations, all of which are interchangeable. Traditionalists will appreciate the Shimano XT drivetrain on the S12 model we have on test, while those who prefer sthe convenience and durability of an internally gear hub may be inclined to look at the Rohloff-equipped S14 model. Both the S12 and S14 are available with either 27.5x4" or 29x2.6" wheels and tires, with our 'urban assault' configured bike featuring the 29" wheels throughout the testing period. The longtail frame is designed for a maximum gross vehicle weight (MGVW) of 210kg on the road and 180kg off-road, meaning you could tackle everything from daycare drop-offs to a fully loaded backwoods trail-building session on this genre-bending cargo bike.

To further enhance the versatility of the Orox, Tern has designed a wide array of accessories to help you dial in the setup to your specific needs. Similar to selecting options on a brand new car, you can roll out of the dealership with the standard configuration or fully trick it out with accessories from the complete catalogue. Standard features include the Bosch Kiox display and Connect Module, frame bag, mudguards, kickstand, a 700-lumen integrated front light, and a 100kg capacity rear rack. A 725Wh battery is also included as standard on the S12, with an optional second 800Wh battery available as an accessory. All these bells and whistles add up, with a standard medium Orox (excluding battery) weighing in at 34.4 kg. Our fully optioned, dual-battery rig tipped the scales at an Earth-shattering 52kg.

You'll notice our test Orox has two child seats attached, and for good reason. Outside of my time on the mountain bike, I also have my own personal cargo bike, which is primarily used to ferry my two toddlers to and from daycare. As such, I was excited to compare the on-road capability of the Orox with that of my more traditional rig. Furthermore, the Orox is

Hayden Wright

RIDING EXPERIENCE:
A little bit of everything since the days of 26" wheels

GENERALLY RIDES:
Specialized Stumpjumper Evo, Commencal Absolut

HEIGHT: 192cm

WEIGHT: 76kg

BIKE TEST TRACK: Here there and everywhere in Brisbane

rated to carry one passenger (over 26kg) on gravel roads and can also be ridden off-road sans passengers. I was particularly curious to explore this off-road capacity, given the dichotomy between the aggressive tire setup, powerful motor, and 4-piston Magura brakes, in contrast to the super long wheelbase and high system weight.

ON THE ROAD & TRAIL

I threw the Orox straight in the deep end, with my first ride being fully loaded with two toddlers as I completed the routine daycare drop off. Comfort was the first thing that came to mind, as I was pleasantly surprised with the spacious feel of the rider triangle. While the reach length and seat tube angle aren't made available by Tern, I can report that the cockpit on our large test bike felt comfortable and familiar. A short 65mm stem and 800mm wide bar further add to the familiarity, something that is a welcome change from the typical cargo bikes set-up that's aimed towards use in an urban environment.

The on-road handling was fairly intuitive once I became accustomed to the extended wheelbase and high centre of gravity – something which was particularly apparent at low speeds but quickly dissipated as I powered up towards the 25km/h assist limit. Of particular note was the fantastic roll-over thanks to the 29x2.6" wheels. While I wasn't hopping gutters and smashing down stairs with my two daughters strapped into the rear seats, the way the big wheels smoothed out potholes and traffic islands was very apparent.

Soon use of our Subaru Forester family car had seriously atrophied for any errand or kid-related journey close to home, as the Orox quickly became a favourite mode of transport for my twin daughters. Trips that were once mundane exercises in driving and parking our family car were replaced with fun, mini adventures on the path less travelled, with my daughters excitedly pointing out every dog, bird and cat we saw on our way. I even began to tow my own dirt jumper to the local pump track on the back of the Orox; a 10km journey each way. Tern's optional tow kit is a really well thought out product and did a great job of helping me drag my Commencal Absolut to my much loved Tuesday night riding session.

Once I had a bit of time to myself during the summer holidays, I began to take the Orox on some solo offroad missions in a quest to see how it handled on the dirt. I found that it was an absolute machine on smooth fire roads, regardless of the gradient. The powerful Bosch CX motor and 1370mm long wheelbase worked in beautiful harmony as the bike hummed up and down any graded fire road I put before it. Steep ascents and descents were a breeze, although a little more foresight was required to modulate downhill momentum to keep the 50kg+ rig from becoming a runaway freight train of sorts.

Traction was plentiful, as the Schwalbe Johnny Watts tyres scratched and clawed their way through the hardpack soil I have near home. In one instance I did lose traction on a steep climb, but fortunately the Bosch CX motor has fantastic hill hold and walk mode functionality which saved my bacon in this instance.

As my confidence in the Orox's off-road ability grew I began to take some less manicured gravel roads and fire trails, where I quickly found its limit. Due to the high weight and extensive wheelbase you as the rider have very little influence on the weight bias between the front and rear wheels. This

• GAS FILLS & SWAPS
• KEY CUTTING
• POOL WATER TESTING
• DELIVERIES
• CLICK & COLLECT
MITRE 10
HOURS OF BUSINESS
the hub
ORNAMENTAL
MIGHTY GREAT DEAL

really rears its head when crossing erosion channels for example, as you are entirely at the mercy of the terrain with no suspension or even the ability to effectively lift the front wheel at your disposal. As a result the ride can become very rough and downright scary without a moment's notice.

If you do encounter rough terrain it's best to approach it like you are in a 4x4. Go slow, lean on the traction and torque at your disposal and pick the smoothest line possible. Another unexpected but frustrating hurdle I had to overcome with the Orox was motorcycle barriers (pardon the pun). My local state forest has low horizontal bars at most entrances, designed to stop motorcycles from entering. These are no issue on a normal bicycle, but were a nightmare on the Orox.

Getting the big beast over these bars was achievable on my own but took a huge amount of effort to the point where I was actively seeking out routes which I knew would avoid such barriers. To this end, single track is pretty much a no-go outside of green flow trails. While mild rock gardens and bermed turns are manageable, you really need to pick your battles and avoid anything with roll-over style features or any tight transitions.

Throughout testing the componentry and motor performed beautifully, with not a single glitch from any of the systems. The Magura brakes were powerful and quiet, with the 12-speed Hyperglide XT drivetrain providing smooth shifts and plenty of gearing range when paired with the 32T front chainring.

Similarly all of the Tern accessories were near flawless, with only the kickstand clapping up and down against the frame being of annoyance, something Tern themselves are aware of and are in the process of fixing. The estimated range calculations provided by Bosch's clever flow app were all fairly accurate, with my own hand calculations confirming what it was displaying.

On a steep fire road bash with the Orox fully loaded I averaged around 14wh/km in boost mode, meaning you would get up to 60 km from one 725wh battery riding in this manner.

Bosch's flow app was also a fantastic ride companion when paired with the optional smartphone grip, allowing me to use my phone as a head unit while riding. This gives fantastic visibility to range statistics, and also has an integrated maps feature all of which is based around a mount which charges your phone as you ride. Neat! Once subscribed to the free app you can also track your bike's location and remotely lock the battery into being off, two fantastic anti-theft features that I wish every high end e-bike had.

LIVING WITH THE TERN OROX

While out and about on the Orox I was surprised how often people asked me what it was like to work on, and if I had given any consideration to how I would transport it should the need arise.

Simply put, it's like owning a dirt bike. Trail side maintenance is possible, however you will likely need to remove a few parts to get to the source of the issue. Fortunately there is plenty of space for tools storage so there is no excuse for getting stuck in the middle of nowhere with a flat tyre or snapped chain. In my personal tool kit were two multi tools (including a nifty one Tern themselves produce), OneUp EDC pump, shifter, tube, tyre levers and some zip ties. Note that there are multiple Tern

dealerships in each capital city which offer mobile servicing to some degree should you need it.

If you were to do some more serious damage to the point that a component needs replacing, Tern Australia holds a full catalogue of spare parts right down to spokes and idler pulleys. As for the question of transporting the Orox, I can again make the dirt bike comparison. Given its weight and size you either need a single cab ute or van to get it from A to B within a vehicle, with a loading ramp also being very useful. Alternatively, I would suggest purchasing and modifying a dirt bike hitch carrier. With the Orox having a similar total length as a 450cc motocross bike it will easily fit on one with some minor modifications and be well under the weight limit.

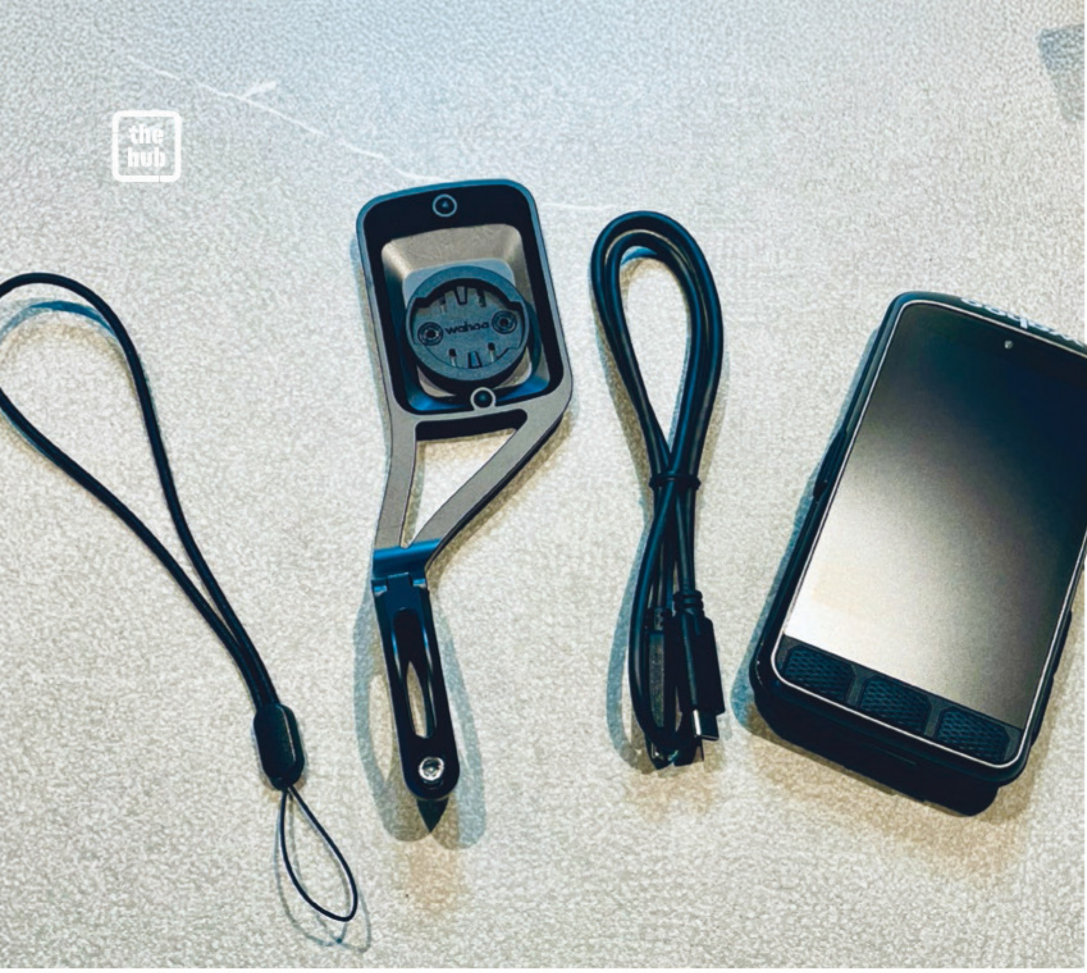
OUR TAKE

Gravel bike? Tourer? Car replacement? Family adventure rig? Yes. The Tern Orox can be all of them. Across our testing period I have been really pleased with this cargo bike's ability to be a tool to improve day to day life as much as something to get out on and enjoy. While its off-road capacity isn't as much as I had hoped due to its size and weight, being able to smash over some steep fire roads on the most direct way to work, after dropping my kids off to daycare, without range anxiety at all is something I really grew to love. While the price of entry is high you are getting a few bikes rolled into one for your money and even a car replacement in the right scenarios. For those who can justify the value proposition that is the Tern Orox, it's a no brainer.

Essentials

BRAND	Tern
MODEL	Orox S12 (29")
RRP	$9995 Excluding accessories
WEIGHT	34.5 kg (medium, excluding accessories) 52kg (large, including accessories, actual)
AVAILABLE SIZES	Medium, large (tested)
FRAME MATERIAL	Tern Orox, 6061 alloy
FORK	Atlas X, chromoly steel
SHIFTERS	Shimano XT 12-speed
DERAILLEUR	Shimano XT 12-speed
CRANK	Tern 175mm
CHAINRING	32T
MOTOR	Bosch CX Gen 4
BATTERY	Bosch 750wh with 800wh range extender option
CHAIN	KMC 12 speed, 144 links
CASSETTE	Shimano XT 12 speed, 10-51T
HUBS	Tern Atlas X, boost
SPOKES	Stainless steel
RIMS	Tern Atlas X, 32H, 29"
TYRES	Schwalbe Johnny Watts, 29x2.6"
BRAKES	Magura MT5
ROTORS	Magura 203mm
STEM	Level Nine, 65mm
HANDLEBARS	Level Nine, aluminium, 800mm
SEATPOST	Syntace P6, 34.9mm
SADDLE	Ergon SM, E Mountain Sport

ternbicycles.com/au



tested

WAHOO
ELEMNT ACE

IS THIS YOUR NEW FAVOURITE BIKE COMPUTER?

Wahoo Fitness was founded in 2009 and quickly became a leading name in the world of cycling and fitness technology. The brand's mission has always been to create innovative, high-performance products that enhance the athlete's training experience.

The launch of their first Elemnt cycling computer in 2015 made a significant mark on the cycling world with it's simple, intuitive user interface that set it apart from other cycling computers at the time. Today, Wahoo's range of cycling computers, including the Elemnt Roam and Elemnt Bolt, are known for their sleek design, advanced functionality, and user-centered approach. Their latest offering, the Elemnt Ace, takes the capability and durability of Wahoo computers to the next level.

A QUICK LOOK AT THE ELEMNT ACE

When I unboxed the Ace, the size immediately struck me: this is a large computer. At 126mm x 72mm x 24mm, it's not much smaller than my antique iPhone 12. At 206g, it's also one of the weightier options on the market; it's larger than the Wahoo Roam and the Garmin Edge 1050.

The provided mount isn't compatible with 35mm handlebars, which is notable for mountain bikers. Mounting the Ace on my road and gravel bikes was no issues with the supplied mount, I required a K-Edge Adjustable Wahoo stem mount for use on my cross country and trail bike.

Once powered on, pairing the Ace with your phone via the illuminated QR code is easy. From there, you can pair your authorised apps, build workout profiles, or simply mount it on your bike and start pedaling.

The Ace features a 480 x 720 pixel display, on par with the Hammerhead Karoo computer, a market leader in computer display. It also has a slightly larger display than the Karoo at 96.7mm.

I've tested both the most recent versions of the Wahoo Elemnt Bolt and the Hammerhead Karoo V2, and they both offer solid battery life (Wahoo around 14 hours, Hammerhead around 11.5 hours, as tested). However, this isn't enough for bikepackers or ultra-endurance athletes. The resolution and mapping capabilities drained the Karoo quicker than the Bolt, but this is something that Wahoo has addressed in developing the Ace, while still retaining a high-quality display. In fact, the Ace's claimed battery life is up to 30 hours.

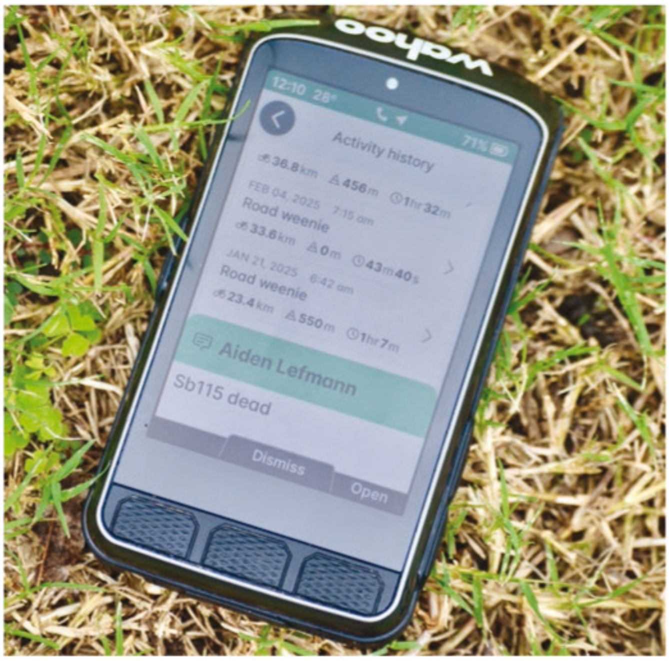
In addition to size, display, and battery life improvements, there are a raft of new features unveiled with the Ace, including voice navigation prompts, a digital bell, wind metrics, a dashboard view, enhanced maps, profiles, integration with the Wahoo app, Strava Live Segments, a new oversized mount, music control page, and 64GB of storage.

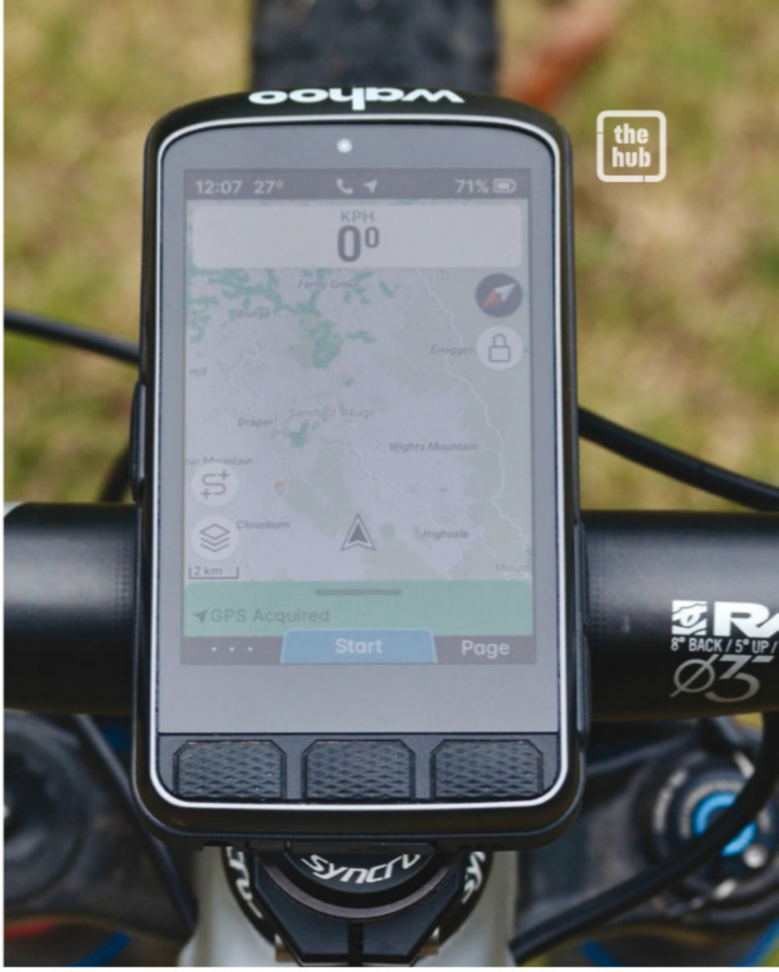
KEY FEATURES FOR GRAVEL RIDERS AND MOUNTAIN BIKERS

Touchscreen Maps, Navigation, and Voice Capability
Maps on the Ace are beautiful, there's no doubt about it. You can use the side buttons to zoom in and out to navigate the map. Hit the lock button on the screen to pinch in and out and drag across the map to navigate.

- + *New dashboard makes sensor pairing easy*
- + *Maps are luscious*
- + *Digital bike bell*
- + *Tactile buttons and touchscreen capability*
- − *It's large and weighty*
- − *Connectivity can lag*
- − *Some features and integrations are still scheduled to be released*

RRP: $999
fesports.com.au





The maps are generated from OpenStreetMap, and using the Ace around my trails, it already features all my local sanctioned (and many unsanctioned) trails. The navigation page also shows points of interest, street names, and Summit Segments.

Loading a route is easy—simply authorize connection with a mapping app and hit 'routes', which appears in the main menu's route section.

If you're on a ride and get lost, or need to reroute, simply stop route navigation, select 'route to' in the map submenu, and choose from saved locations. Alternatively, you can select a location on the map. It even allows you to choose whether you want a trail or road adventure. We found directions to be a little slow, which is something to keep in mind on urban rides with many streets.

The Ace is Wahoo's first bike computer with touchscreen capability. Its dynamic display clearly shows maps and metrics, which can be scaled and controlled with a simple pinch, press, or swipe – much like your phone. To unlock the screen, simply tap the padlock icon in the top right corner. Sweaty conditions? The Ace also features grippy, textured buttons, so you can still toggle screens, hit laps, and control maps with wet fingers.

Wahoo announced another big change with the Ace: it now syncs with the Wahoo app instead of the Elemnt app, allowing instant integration with their ecosystem of workouts. From the app, you can enable integration with various third-party apps and websites, such as Strava, TrainingPeaks, Komoot, and RidewithGPS. Authorising a mapping app automatically populates the 'route' tab with your saved loops, making route selection easy.

After loading a route, the Ace offers voice-enabled navigation so you can even have the Ace guide you in German for an added (much scarier) adventure.

The Wahoo Ace also features a music control page, which lets you control your music selection if paired with your phone. This is great for riders using headphones that don't have built-in music controls.

The Curiosity of the Digital Bike Bell

It's a little left field – the Wahoo Ace has integrated a digital bike bell using the unit's inbuilt speakers. Simply tap the center footer button on any page or double-tap on the main data page to ring the bell. I actually did this by accident before realising it was a feature and had no idea what was happening.

This could be a useful feature for riders who don't want to use a real bell but ride on shared paths. Police have occasionally set up checkpoints on heavily trafficked bike paths in Brisbane to issue fines to cyclists without bells. How great would it be to show the police you're compliant? Alternatively, you could use it during a cross country race instead of calling out "track" (I'm only half-joking here).

Dashboard and Profiles

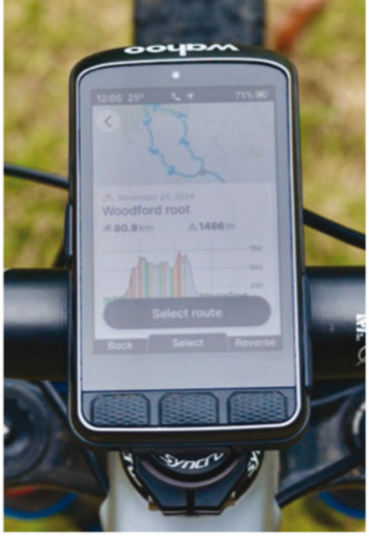
The Ace launches Wahoo's first ready-to-ride dashboard. The dashboard features a menu with workout profiles, routes, and workouts. It also displays and allows sensor connections with a visual display of their battery life. This is a nice feature for anyone who has suffered from the 'battery low' message mid-ride.

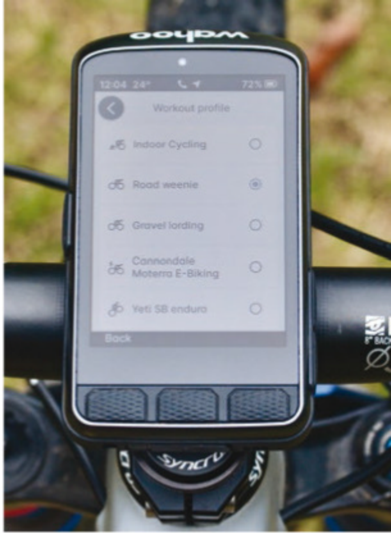
When it comes to workout profiles, you can select the standard cycling or indoor cycling workout profile or create a range of other profiles in the Wahoo app. This is great for cyclists with various bikes or disciplines who use different sensors or value different metrics depending on the ride. For example, on a technical cross country ride, your speed metric is pretty meaningless. However, this may be more useful on a fast-paced gravel race.

Wahoo may be a bit late to the party with profiles compared to other computer manufacturers, but this update is much-needed. I set up a profile for each bike with selected sensor data and metrics based on the type of riding done on each bike. There are literally hundreds of options to choose from, allowing for plenty of customisation.

Each workout page within the profile can be zoomed in or out. You can

the hub
57244501071
ELEMNT ACE
DESIGNED IN ATLANTA, GA USA
Assembled in Taiwan
Model : WFCC7 V1





feature as few as two data fields or as many as eleven. Needless to say, if you have seven or fewer data fields, they're all HUGE. This is a massive bonus for someone who stares at a computer screen all day (note to self: book an optometrist appointment).

Profiles for my cross country and trail bike focus on key metrics like gradient, power, heart rate, and distance, with a second climbing and elevation page in addition to the Summit Segments page. You can also disable or adjust the Summit Segment pop-up page that automatically activates when approaching a climb on the Wahoo app. The default option is constantly activating on lumpy terrain, but enabling Summit Segments only for medium and large climbs ensures it only activates on substantial climbs.

There are also specific e-bike options, including battery percentage, remaining range, and operating mode. For the dedicated enduro rider, metrics are available to track both descent and ascent.

Structured Workouts

One of the great aspects of previous Wahoo computers is using color to identify training zones. Whether you're in a structured workout or on a zone 2 ride/easy day, if your power and/or heart rate zones are set up correctly, you only have yourself to blame if you're straying from the desired zone.

Once again, it's easy to import structured workouts by authorising the app and then hitting 'workout' in the dashboard. Once you launch the structured workout, the Ace makes it easy to see if you're above or below target, counting down to the next workout step with audible beeps for the last five seconds. This is quite loud, though, so it won't win you any friends on a social group ride. The Ace has removed the colored LEDs that visually represented whether you were above or below target from previous Wahoo computers. While this may upset some riders who ride in low light conditions, I still found structured workouts to be a highlight of my experience with the Ace.

Just a note: If you generate your own workouts using third-party apps, make sure you specify a power or heart rate range rather than a specific target. Staying exactly at 235 watts or a heart rate of 178 bpm means you'll spend the entire workout just above or below the target, and no one likes to fail their workout.

Battery Life: Claims vs Reality

Wahoo claims a massive 30 hours of battery life, but my initial 10 hours of ride time with the unit left only 36% remaining. Wahoo has indicated that accessing the maximum 30 hours of battery life requires setting the backlight to 5 seconds instead of automatic. This definitely helped increase battery life, with it lasting over 26 hours of cumulative use with the backlight set to 5 seconds and without using extra features. If you're an ultra-cyclist, don't throw away that extra power bank just yet!

Keeping it Aero

'Aero metrics' is a new feature launched with the Elemnt Ace, and I'll touch on it briefly. The Ace features a 15mm wide port on the front of the computer that tracks air resistance in real-time, represented as 'AirBoost' and 'AirDrag'. Just like power or heart rate metrics, these metrics are available for analysis post-ride.

While it's an interesting feature that could be useful for gravel riders in tightly packed bunch riding, it's less relevant for mountain bikers. In my experience, most of my riding has been in 'neutral air' or 'airboost', which is what you get when noodling around the road and trails solo.

Strava Integrations

Wahoo has flagged Strava integrations as coming in early 2025. For those who love racing against the clock, the Ace will allow riders to see real-time progress during segment hunting for Strava Premium users (requires a phone connection/internet). The Ace can also transmit live tracking to anyone with an active link. For mountain biking and safety, this is a great feature, and one I'll use on my more remote rides.

Ride Experience

Though the Ace is a large computer, the display is brilliant, and mapping and navigation are significantly improved over previous Elemnt models. Acquiring GPS can take a little more time than other units on the market, which is a mild but valid source of irritation.

The new dashboard is exceptional and allows quick access to all sensors and menus a rider needs before heading out. Accessing routes and workouts is seamless. The addition of profiles was very much needed to keep Wahoo competitive with other manufacturers, and the execution is exceptional. The use of profiles and the endless sub-menus allows for almost infinite combinations of metrics, and zooming in and out ensures good visibility for even the most myopic rider.

The digital bell is a feature no one thought to request, but it's an awesome add-on. Ditto the music feature—neither of these are make-or-break selling points, but they represent nice-to-have features for someone who spends a lot of time on the bike.

My frustrations with the Ace mainly revolve around connectivity: uploading to third-party apps isn't automatic (though you can manually change the settings to auto-share), GPS signal acquisition takes longer than on other units I use, and activity uploads to the Wahoo app can require relaunching the app and reconnecting the Ace (the old 'turn everything off and on again' routine).

Additionally, while the battery life claim is reasonable when the backlight is adjusted to 5 seconds, this is a consideration for bikepacking or 24-hour racing. You may still need your battery pack!

While I have no qualms about adding weight to my bike with the chunkier Wahoo Ace, the heavier weight may be a dealbreaker for weight weenies who want one computer to rule them all.

Many of the updates launched with the Ace represent Wahoo coming into line with others on the market. The beautiful map interface and intuitive usability of the dashboards, workouts, and profiles mean that, in some regards, it is a segment leader. I have no doubt that with ongoing updates, the Wahoo Ace will hit a home run. It's a beautiful computer to use; it's just not quite the game changer we thought it would be…yet.

Anna Beck

PURE
SPORTS NUTRITION
20g
RECOVERY SHAKE

BEFORE DURING RECOVERY
PREMIUM NATURAL PROTEIN POWDER
PURE
SPORTS NUTRITION
20g PROTEIN PER SERVE
RECOVERY SHAKE
A COMPLETE RECOVERY DRINK WITH
MULTI-FLORA MANUKA HONEY, CACAO POWDER,
MILK PROTEINS AND ESSENTIAL MINERALS
79g
the hub

tested

PURE SPORTS NUTRITION

➕

Tasty and hits targets for protein and carbohydrates

➕

Mixes well

➕

Natural ingredients

➖

Expensive

➖

Not for lactose-free or milk-allergic athletes

RRP:
$6.99 PER SINGLE SERVE SACHET

$39.99 475G POUCH

puresportsnutrition.com

Many of us have to fit our love of mountain biking between real-life responsibilities. Unlike professional cyclists who are paid to eat, sleep and ride on repeat, the rest of us often flirt with our limits on the bike while also having to function in other areas of life.

Pure Sports Nutrition is a New Zealand brand that understands the requirements of athletes – whether Olympic hopefuls or weekend warriors – and creates products that allow athletes of all levels to reap the benefits of their hard work. I tested their new Recovery Shake product to see if it could improve my performance in my glimmers of ride time between grown-up responsibilities like working, gardening and parenting.

Pure's Recovery Shake was recently released as single-serve sachets in addition to a full-sized pouch. Featuring 300 calories per serving, the 75g Recovery sachet offers 20g protein and 41g carbohydrates in addition to electrolytes (calcium, potassium, sodium and magnesium). The Recovery Shake promises to replenish glycogen stores, restore hydration and assist with muscle protein synthesis after a hard workout. Pure also produces a whey protein product with similar protein content without carbohydrates if you prefer to eat carbohydrates separate from a shake for recovery.

While I usually use 'real food' for recovery, there are times when a shake is very useful, especially as a convenience product after a race, when trying to increase your overall calories, or when you don't have an opportunity for a meal straight after a session. The key use for recovery products personally, is between sessions on a double day.

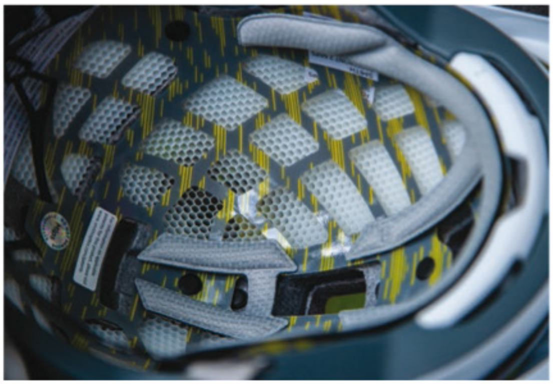
The Pure Sports Nutrition Recovery Shake product couldn't arrive at a better time. A hard week of riding in the holiday period left me feeling well and truly zapped, unable to make power on the bike and feeling the heaviness of fatigue in both legs and body. While a few days of resting helped a little, lingering fatigue meant I needed to bring out the big guns and hone my recovery around sessions to get back on top of things. Could Pure's Recovery Shake do the job?

Mixing the shake is easy; simply empty the sachet into 450ml later and shake. The powder mixes easily with water; no gym junkie protein shakers or whisks required. Taste-wise, it has a pleasant, subtle chocolate flavour that belies the carbohydrate content. It's pleasant and inoffensive and lacks the chemical flavour I've experienced in many protein and recovery shakes, a view shared with others who sampled the shake post-ride.

With the main ingredients being skim and whole milk powder, this isn't a shake for the lactose intolerant or those with milk-protein allergies. The shake is sweetened with multi-flora Manuka honey, cacao and natural chocolate flavour, and the ingredients don't show any nasties or numbers.

So how did it go? Pure's Recovery shake certainly made my legs and body feel a little less sad and sore. While it's difficult to tell if it's the shake's composition, the extra caloric boost, or just organic recovery finally happening, I am happy to attribute feeling better to using the shake and prioritising good recovery habits.

I'd recommend Pure's Recovery Shake for riders requiring a recovery product due to heavy training loads, persistent fatigue or simply as a convenience product when training on the move. Personally, I see a spot for Pure's Recovery shake on days where I both ride and strength train, as that has been a difficult day for my body to recover from. For those who have food intolerances and can't eat the race-day sausage sizzle, Pure Recovery Shake in a single-serve sachet is a great convenience option. I'd also use this on the days when I go from being on the bike to in the office within ten minutes, so I can make my 9 am meeting while also meeting my recovery needs.



tested

- *Looks good*
- *Multiple glasses mounting options*
- *Multiple safety features*

- *Can get warm*

RRP: $375
Smithopticsaustralia.com

SMITH
FOREFRONT 2 MIPS

The Forefront 2 is Smith's newest trail helmet offering, promising to prioritise safety without compromising aesthetics.

The Forefront 2 replaces the 'OG' Forefront, with multiple safety features including Koroyd coverage, a Mips slip-liner and an integrated skeletal structure that acts like a 'roll cage' for increased impact protection. Mips, Koroyd...what does all this mean?

Koroyd is an integrated crumple protection in the helmet's lining that reduces impact and shearing forces in the case of a crash. Koroyd is a thin layer of circular co-polymer extruded tubes that are thermally welded together within the inner shell of the helmet. When the helmet has an impact the Koroyd absorbs the force in a controlled manner, minimising the energy transferred to the head. This feature also reduces angular rotation – a key component in many head injuries – by a claimed 91%.

Mips is a technology that likely needs no introduction if you've been mountain biking for a few years. Mips is an 'ingredient brand', like Koroyd, that is integrated into helmet design as an additional safety feature. The yellow inner liner of your helmet? That's Mips, a low-friction liner that reduces injury from angular impacts by allowing the head to move naturally within the helmet when struck, thereby reducing the forces transferred.

But selecting a helmet isn't just down to safety features. Sure, that's the primary purpose of a helmet, but fit and aesthetics are also important.

Other key features of the Forefront 2 include: glasses and goggle compatibility, VaporFit 270 degree dial adjustment system, 20 vents, a three-position visor, antimicrobial lining and camera and light-mount compatibility. Phew.

The Forefront 2 positions itself as a solid, everyday trail helmet. The low-profile visor is a departure from the current trend of maximalist visors, and its 3-position fit means the helmet has capacity to hold glasses on the front or back of the helmet when not over your peepers. This is perfect for long humid climbs with foggy glasses or when removing your glasses in darker terrain – both are things I tend to do regularly.

As for fit, we tested out the size small (51-55cm), and as a self described pin-head I found the fit was a little narrower than other helmets on the market, but my 54cm noggin still had some room to spare. The 270 degree dial system offers a snug fit around the side and rear of the helmet, and the rear coverage toes the line between a slimline road helmet and more aggressive enduro helmet.

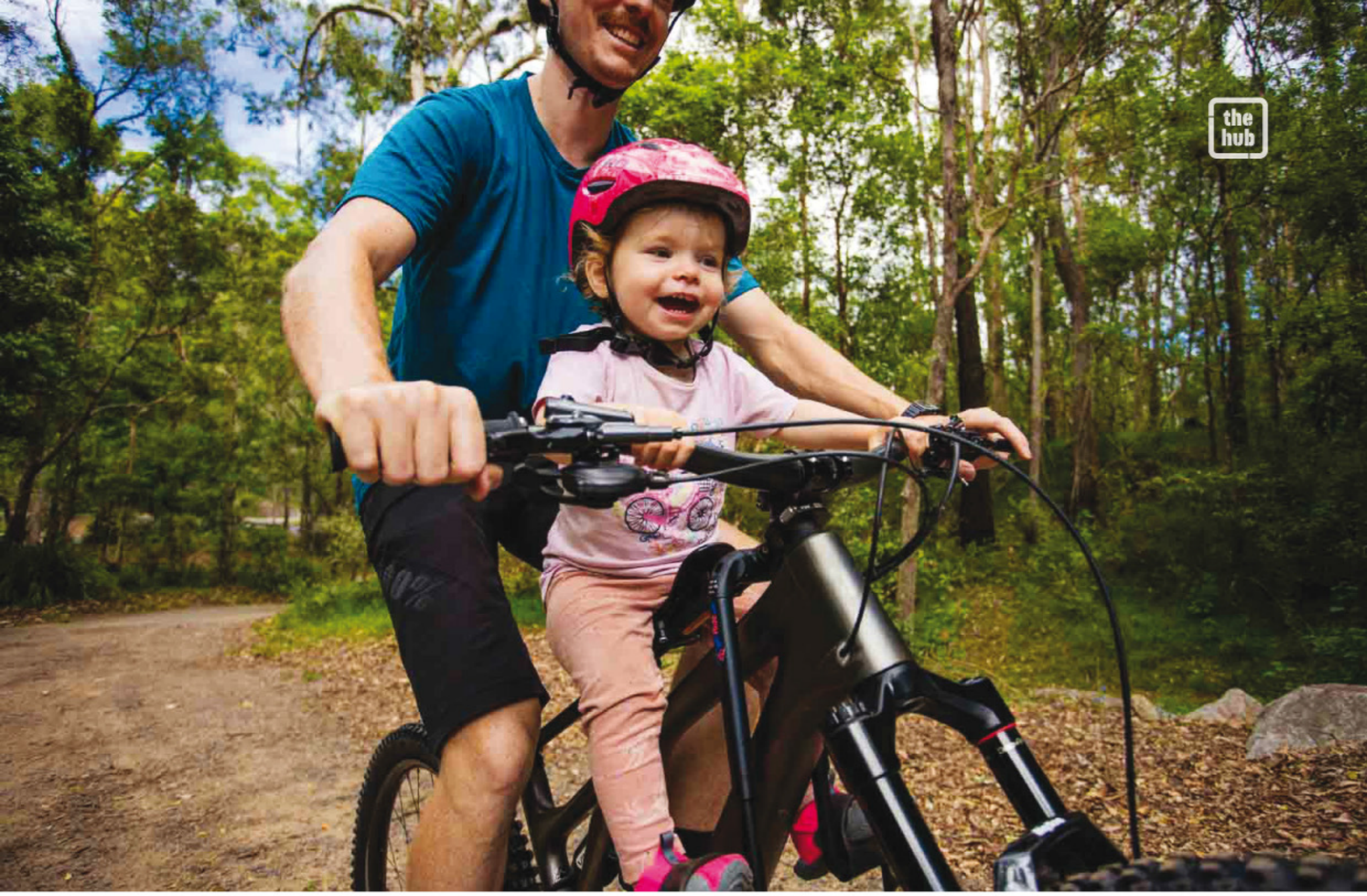
Riding the Forefront 2 in the Australian summer really puts Smith's ventilation claims to the test. While the Koroyd is present throughout the majority of the helmet, the two front centre vents are open allowing for a little more airflow. Despite the claim that Koroyd allows great ventilation, there is a small cost to airflow associated with the protective lining. This isn't likely a dealbreaker in moderate climates, but a warm head was noticeable on still, hot days while climbing at my default speed (a snail's pace).

Overall, the Forefront 2 ticks almost all the boxes. It's a good looking, lightweight trail helmet with a stack of safety features including a few ways to hold your specs. Everything is a compromise in life, and even though the Koroyd is a tad warm, I'll take the heat if it means more protection for my head.

Anna Beck

Colours:
matte cinder haze (orange), matt moss and stone (green and teal), matte white (tested) and matte black

Sizes:
small (51-55cm), medium (55-59cm) and large (59-63cm)



tested

+ *A fun and engaging way to get out on the bike with your toddler*

+ *Elegant construction leading to quick and easy install*

+ *Contact free design*

+ *Adaptable to a variety of mounting constraints*

− *You can't guarantee your kid is going to enjoy it*

− *Pedalling position can cause knee discomfort for some*

WEIGHT: 1550 GRAMS
RRP: $399.95
mtbdirect.com.au

MAC RIDE CHILD BIKE SEAT

Let's face it, having a baby with your significant other has a massive effect on your mountain biking life. Thoughts that were once, "where am I going riding this morning?", are now swapped for "gee, I would love an uninterrupted night's sleep." Mercifully, the newborn phase only lasts so long, and soon your focus shifts to getting out and about with your little one, showing them the things you love.

This is where kids' bike seats come into play, giving you the opportunity to share your passion for riding and the outdoors with your child. Neck strength, coordination, and the ability to listen to (and follow) instructions are all required in different amounts, depending on the bike seat you choose.

The Mac Ride sits at the most advanced end of the spectrum. Fortunately, my daughters have just developed to the point where riding this mid-mounted child bike seat is within their ability, and we've been getting out on father-daughter rides together over the spring and summer months to determine if the Mac Ride is worth your hard-earned money.

OUT OF THE BOX

The Mac Ride child bike seat spans the space between your seat post and steerer and is rated for little rippers aged 2–5 and up to 27 kg. A market once dominated by the Shotgun seat now sees the Mac Ride emerge as a worthy competitor, with standout features that help this Canadian-designed, Taiwanese-made product stand on its own merit. The telescoping frame is made from aluminum, with steel legs and a plastic saddle with a non-slip coating.

Unlike the Shotgun seat, the Mac Ride saddle is a bespoke design that minimises stack height and maximises support, increasing clearance between your child's head and your chin by around 40mm. Based around a telescopic center piece, the Mac Ride offers adjustability for saddle length, saddle position, stirrup angle, stirrup length, and foot thickness. All of this is delivered in an adaptable, contact-free design that keeps your frame free from scuffs and scratches.

Included with the Mac Ride are two 1-⅛" front mount spacers, which are 10mm thick and have an outer diameter of 42mm. These act as a keyed anchor for the front end of the Mac Ride and must be mounted under your stem with no obstruction. The rear of the Mac Ride simply clamps to your seat post – whether a fixed post or the lower (fixed) portion of your dropper post – requiring 20mm of space above the seat clamp. With adapters available for bikes with a wider top tube and some bespoke steerer spacer setups, the Mac Ride fits most mountain bikes, assuming you have a minimum of 10 mm of exposed steerer tube.

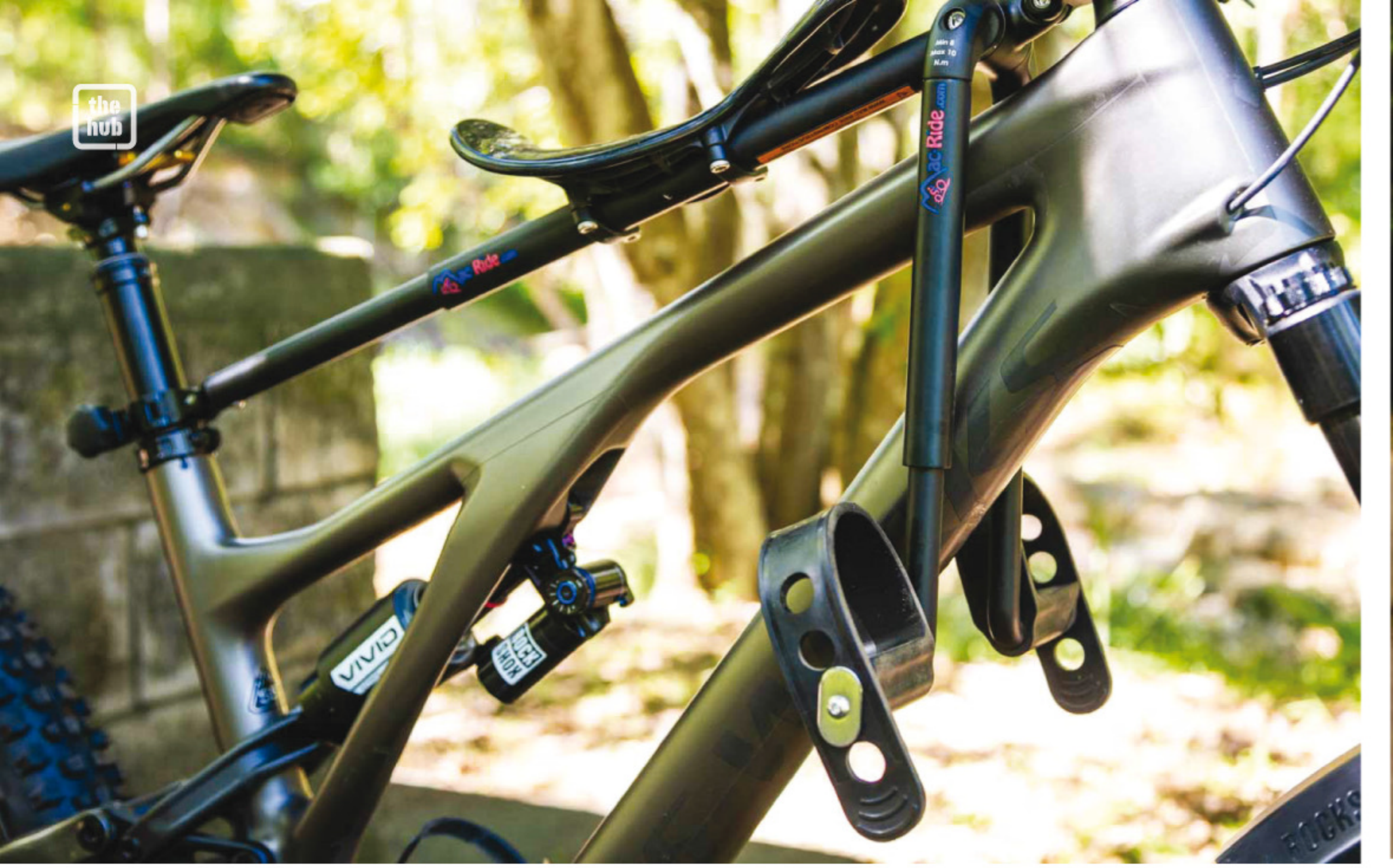
Riders with headset cable routing may also find that while the mounting spacer fits, the cables entering the head tube may clash with the mounting mechanism on the Mac Ride itself. This will depend on the specific setup. For reference, the mounted external diameter of the Mac Ride at your steerer is 62mm for anyone wanting to check clearance before purchasing.

FOR RIDES OF EXCEPTIONAL QUALITY

VALA
SANTA CRUZ

The Vala is a full-power ebike that delivers precision and power. It’s made for riders looking for focused performance on the best trails. Perfectly balanced, refined suspension and the finest quality construction, as always.

150mm of VPP™ Travel | MX Wheel Size | Bosch Performance Line CX Motor



INSTALLATION

The initial installation of the Mac Ride is a quick and easy job that any novice mechanic can complete. Removing your top cap and stem is all that's required before replacing one of your steerer spacers with the provided 10mm thick, female keyed spacer. Since two are provided with each Mac Ride, I installed one on both my and my wife's mountain bikes with no issue. From there, you simply slot the male key of the Mac Ride into the steerer spacer and tighten the bolt to 4Nm with a 5mm allen key. The next step is to extend the telescopic main frame until the rear contacts with your seat post. Finally, you hand-tighten the rear mount – a process that takes less than a minute.

Once installed, the fit and finish gave me confidence that my daughters would be safe on the Mac Ride, so we took the time to adjust the saddle and stirrup position to suit their 2-year-old stature. To our surprise, both girls took to an 'attack' riding position naturally, with their knees bent and chin over the bars. Removing the Mac Ride is the same process in reverse, with the added bonus that by loosening the stirrup leg bolt, you can actually fold the Mac Ride completely flat for storage. Once collapsed, the total dimensions are 500mm long and 290mm wide – small enough to easily be strapped to the outside of a backpack.

ON THE TRAIL

Without a doubt, the first outing I had on the Mac Ride with my daughter Elizabeth was the most nerve-racking experience I've had in a long time. It was a very uncomfortable feeling, rolling down my driveway with her perched between my arms, softly holding onto my handlebars. With none of the usual straps and safety devices you'd associate with any toddler-based mode of transport, I was feeling uneasy, to say the least. What if she lets go? What if she loses balance? What if I have to stop all of a sudden? These were all thoughts spinning through my mind for the first minute or so.

Fortunately, the huge smile on her face made all those thoughts quickly disappear. Plain and simple, both of my daughters absolutely adore the Mac Ride. Once adjusted to suit, their seated position looks comfortable, with the bespoke saddle providing plenty of support—even when going up and down steep gradients. There's also plenty of clearance between my chin and the top of her head, thanks to the low stack height of the saddle. With my shock locked out, the pedaling position was fairly comfortable, although I do need to widen my knee stance a little to avoid hitting the back of the Mac Ride with my kneecaps. This will be a particular issue for parents with a bike that has a steep seat tube angle and a short top tube.

Over the following weeks, our rides grew longer and longer, with

my hydration pack now stuffed with nappies, snacks, and wet wipes. At every opportunity, I would choose the Mac Ride over a trip in the car or even on our e-cargo bike — such is the joy of cruising around on your favorite bike with your favorite person between your arms. Elizabeth and Matilda both preferred it too, yelling “MAC RIDE!” when we walked into the garage. The fact that they would occasionally go into a full-blown meltdown when we loaded them onto the cargo bike or into the car rather than on the Mac Ride shows just how much they loved it.

Once I built up enough confidence in both my and my daughters’ comfort on the Mac Ride, we began riding off-road. I’m fortunate to live within riding distance of some great trails, meaning that daddy-daughter time now consists of a morning jaunt down some singletrack. While we are just casually rolling down the smoothest green trails I can find, it’s still an amazing shared experience for us both, with the only downside being the dull knee strain I feel due to the altered pedaling position.

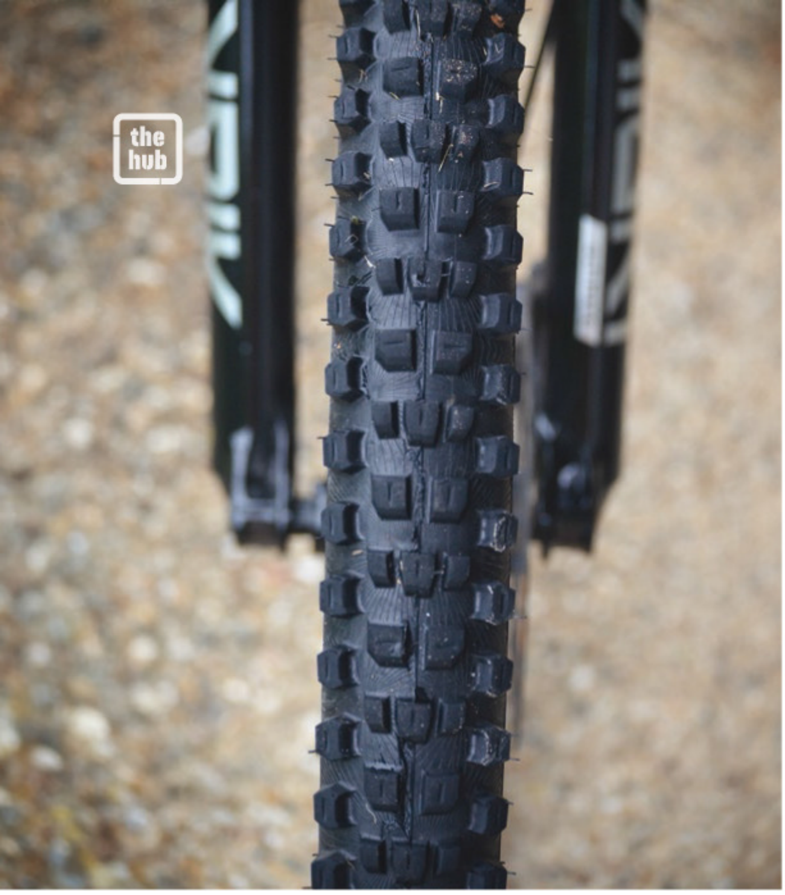
TIPS AND TRICKS

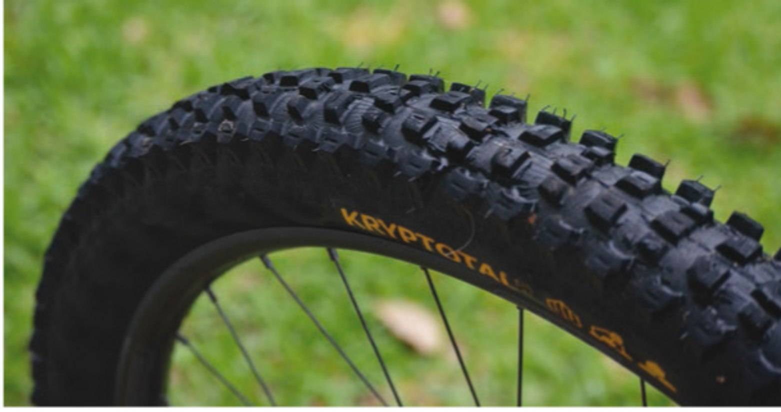
Riding with your little person does take a slightly different technique, with momentum required earlier to get up and over steep pinches, and more braking modulation needed on rougher sections to ensure things stay calm and in control. It’s critical to remember that while you have the foresight and coordination to hold on tight if things suddenly get a little out of hand, your toddler likely doesn’t. As such, any situation like this should be avoided at all costs. My wife and I also found that calling “bump, bump” before any rough section helped keep our daughters engaged and ready for the upcoming compressions. Finally, it’s best to put your dropper post down well in advance of any section where you might want to dab a foot or stop entirely. On a few occasions, my dropper post refused to compress, leaving me scrambling to get my foot down in a safe and controlled manner.

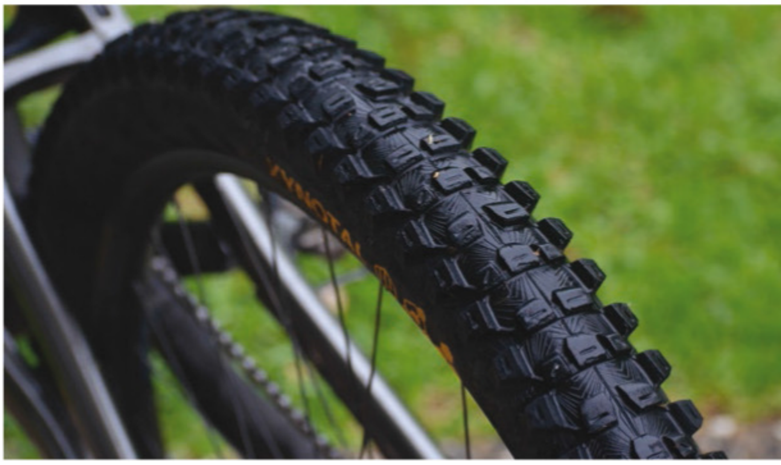
OUR TAKE

The Mac Ride is a must-have for any parent who wants to get out on the trail with their toddler. Furthermore, it has proven to be a fun and adaptable way to do trips to the park and daycare drop-offs. Assuming it’s compatible with your bike, there should be nothing stopping you from buying one – it’s as much for you as it is for your little one.

Hayden Wright







tested

CONTINENTAL

KRYPTOTAL FR AND XYNOTAL | DOWNHILL CASING SUPERSOFT COMBINATION

Continental's range of gravity tyres rated extremely highly with AMB tester Bam during the tyre group test conducted last year. Following his extensive testing, Bam raved about the available compounds and front and rear specific tread patterns, and the resulting trail performance – making them his favourite tyre of the test. Some recent additions have been made to the lineup, including additional tread patterns being made available with a downhill casing and SuperSoft rubber compound. I am a downhill casing fanatic and was excited to receive the mixed condition, front specific Kryptotal FR along with a hardpack condition, rear specific Xynotal tyre ahead of a busy summer of riding.

CASINGS

The gravity range of tyres is available in three casings: trail, enduro and downhill. As you would expect, they increase in thickness and weight as you climb the ladder of support, with our focus being specifically on the downhill casing for this review. Typically, downhill casings are made up of a 60tpi (thread per inch) material to increase the strength and durability of the tyre.

While this does achieve the desired result, you typically have to make some sacrifices when it comes to small bump sensitivity and overall trail feel as a result. Continental has bucked the trend here by designing their downhill casing around a more supple 110tpi casing. With four layers of sidewall carcass, overlapping into six layers through the tread-zone there should still be plenty of support in addition to protection from impact. The foldable bead feels stiff and is supported by a rubber insert that is sandwiched between the two-ply carcass. As is the norm from casings such as Maxxis' DH casing and Pirelli's DualWall+, this rubber insert has been added for additional support and protection at the rim bead.

RUBBER COMPOUND

Similar to the casings, these tyres are available with three distinct and self-explanatory rubber compounds: endurance, soft and super soft. While the endurance compound focuses on balancing both chemical grip and tyre longevity, the soft and super soft compounds prioritise traction over all. The super soft compound is the most pliable variant available. Measured shore A durometer is similar to what I have measured on a Maxxis Maxxgrip or Pirelli SmartEvo DH tyre.

TREAD PATTERN

Both the Xynotal and Kryptotal FR share a similar tread pattern, with only minor differences which tell the tale of their specific-use casing. Decreasing rolling resistance while still maintaining braking performance on hard terrain is the priority of the Xynotal, and as such the tread has large ramps on the leading edges of the centre knobs and lateral siping to encourage knob deformation under braking.

The 2-3 knob pattern on the Xynotal also has alternating knobs for the 2 block, the second of which having a larger ramp to further decrease rolling resistance and increase the contact patch on hardpack. The side knobs on both the Xynotal and Kryptotal FR sit proud of the centre knobs,

+ *Supple ride character*

+ *Great rolling speed*

+ *Consistent performance*

+ *Decent longevity*

− *Difficult to install*

− *Expensive*

SIZES:
KRYPTOTAL - 29X2.4"
XYNOTAL - 27.5X2.4"

WEIGHT:
1310 GRAMS (KRYPTOTAL FR, DOWNHILL CASING, SUPERSOFT, 29X2.4", ACTUAL)
1235 GRAMS (XYNOTAL, DOWNHILL CASING, SUPERSOFT, 27.5X2.4", ACTUAL)

RRP: $169.99

and feature directional siping and an external groove to encourage knob deformation while cornering.

Turning and braking performance across a variety of terrains is the focus of the Kryptotal FR, and it features a slightly more aggressive looking tread pattern to suit. The alternating 2-3 pattern has become common for this style of tyre, and it does a good job of engaging the soil without leaving any dead spots when introducing lean angle. The sipes on the centre knobs run primarily in the direction of rotation, showing that their priority is cornering performance. They do also feature a sipe on the front edge, but it is much shallower than the one seen on the Xynotal to better increase bite through loose soils.

SETUP

Throughout the testing period I had these tyres set up on my personal StumpJumper Evo as follows:

Front/Rear	Diameter	Rim	Rim Width	Tyre	Weight
Front	29"	Stans Flow EX3	29mm	Kryptotal FR	1310 grams
Rear	27.5"	Stans Flow EX3	29mm	Xynotal	1235 grams

Mounting the tyres was quite the challenge. The combination of the notoriously tight fit on the Stan's rims and the bead on the downhill casing tyres was extremely tight. Admittedly, I even managed to tear my rim tape during the first install attempt, such was the heavy handedness I was having to use to get these puppies mounted. Fortunately, I got there in the end albeit with a little sweat on my brow. Measured width once installed was 2.45" on both tyres, with actual weights being 1310 grams for the Kryptotal FR and 1235 grams for the Xynotal. The 1200 - 1400 gram range is typically where I would expect to see the weight of a dual-ply 27.5/29" gravity tyre come in, with these treads from Continental sitting right within that range.

ON THE TRAIL

To me, the mark of a good gravity tyre combination is one which fades into the background once you drop into your first descent. If there are no nasty surprises, such as blown out turns or abrupt rim hits then the tyres are essentially performing as good as those which they just replaced. The mark of a great gravity tyre combination brings pleasant surprises and positive ride character from day dot. This is where the Kryptotal FR and Xynotal sit in my books.

Initial impressions were that of increased small bump compliance and trail feel, undoubtedly thanks to the supple but still thick 110 TPI Downhill casing. I noticed a definite decrease in trail chatter through my hands and feet with pressures at 20PSI F and 26PSI R, with the odd rim ding telling me I was flying just close enough to the sun with my chosen pressures. With this came a marginal but noticeable increase in traction through these rougher sections, increasing my confidence and comfort as a result. The downhill casing retained its form through deep compressions and turns, showing it was still robust and supportive even with how supple they felt.

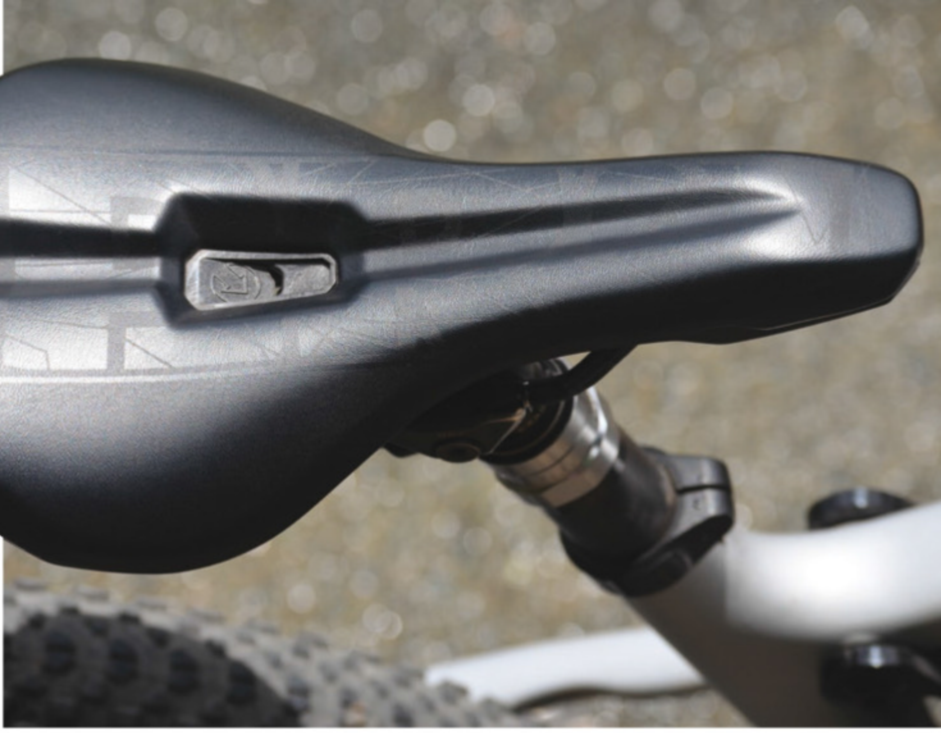
Chemical and mechanical grip on these tyres is also right up there with the best I have used, particularly on the front wheel where traction must take precedence over all else. The Kryptotal FR did a fantastic job of managing a wide variety of terrains, and had a very consistent feel when pushing in corners. As my confidence grew with this tyre, I found myself pushing braking points and corner entrance speed past my previous comfort point.

These tyres have a very rounded profile, giving a fairly consistent feel as you transition from the centre to corner knobs. The Xynotal mirrored this consistency, but definitely lacked some braking traction in comparison to a more traditional rear specific gravity tyre. The trade-off here is rolling resistance, which has really been minimised on the Xynotal thanks to the ramped, low profile centre knobs. On the fast, hard packed trails I typically ride I believe this to be a worthy compromise. It was only when things got particularly steep and loose that I felt the tread pattern left a little to be desired, however this is only a small portion of the riding I typically do. After around 20 hours of use the Kryptotal FR is showing some small signs of wear, while the Xynotal is at around 50% wear.

OUR TAKE

Pardon the pun, but I had been stuck in a bit of a rut when it comes to my tyres of choice up until I received these Conti's for this review. Now, the Kryptotal FR and Xynotal combo is right at the top of my list. While they are admittedly very expensive and difficult to install, all is forgotten when out on the trail. Their soft character, exceptional mechanical grip and impressive rolling speed are a fantastic combination on the hard, rocky trails I typically ride. If you too ride trails of this type and require a set of robust, high performance tyres - look no further.

Hayden Wright



PRO
MSN 1.3 ENDURO SADDLE

Tested

- + *Neutral position centres rider in seat*
- + *Unobstructive on descents*
- + *Reasonable weight for trail saddle*
- − *Mild scuffing on upper from regular use*
- − *More premium offering at a cost*

RRP $235

pro-bikegear.com

Pro is a brand that is known for their ride-ready, no-nonsense components. As I am on a bit of a mission in life to find the one saddle to rule them all, I tested out their newly released MSN 1.3 Enduro saddle.

Designed specifically for enduro and trail riders who tackle tough terrain, the MSN 1.3 is a mildly curved saddle that provides a neutral position on the bike. It features a short-nose design, keeping trend with many newer saddle offerings within the past five years. The MSN 1.3 is offered in 142 and 152mm widths, and features a carbon reinforced base with a central recess and drainage port for those truly mucky and wet days on the bike.

The Pro MSN 1.3 is extra robust thanks to the firm polyurethane upper and reinforced carbon base. Inox stainless steel rails mount the saddle to your seat post, so while the saddle isn't super light at 258g (actual weight, 142mm), it's far from a heavyweight option.

INSTALLATION AND SET-UP

Installing the Pro MSN 1.3 saddle is a piece of cake with a standard post, and is simply a matter of removing your old saddle and sliding the MSN 1.3 onto your post. Pro provide a handy cardboard tool that is integrated into the packaging, allowing the user to identify the 80mm width spot in your existing saddle. Once this is done, you can install the MSN 1.3 in the same position to replicate your existing reach. This is super handy when switching between a standard and short-length saddle, where that 80mm point may be up to 3cm in difference.

Once your saddle is installed with the correct fore-aft, it's a matter of adjusting the saddle angle to ensure you can sit in that desired neutral position. I initially found that I naturally wanted to have the nose of the saddle quite flat, however that pushed me forward onto my hands and made for quite an uncomfortable ride. By incrementally moving the saddle nose upwards I was able to find a spot where I felt noticeably 'in' the saddle, which also eased the pressure from my hands.

ON THE TRAIL

What makes a saddle a good choice for enduro and trail riding? I kept coming back to this thought during the rest period. Coming from a flat, hard short length saddle, the MSN 1.3 really sits you in a solid position when pedalling for long periods and climbing. I found the 142mm to be supportive of both ischial tuberosities (aka sit bones) with the anatomical channel effectively relieving soft tissue discomfort.

With that said, sliding forward onto the nose is still very manageable for very steep and technical climbing. The polyurethane upper allows enough ease of movement without sliding, partially again due to the saddle's mild curve.

Descending is what this saddle is all about, and the MSN 1.3's tapered edges and depth means that it's unlikely to snag shorts if you're hanging off the back. The design also means there's no plastic bits to jab you when moving around on technical trails, something I have found to be prevalent with other short-length saddles that feature bits of plastic reinforcement in awkward spots.

I wasn't able to use this saddle in the monsoonal weather patterns experienced over summer, as local trail networks close when wet, however the drainage port was effective when washing the bike when dirty. I did find that the PU upper showed some signs of wear on the rear of the saddle from everyday use, without any big crashes it's surprising that it exhibited the wear, which is likely a result of cafe-leans post-ride.

OUR TAKE

The PRO MSN 1.3 enduro saddle is a great option for the rider that is prioritising a comfortable seated position for the long grinds to the top of the descent without compromising performance on the way back down. I used this saddle for epic fire road rides, social cross country jaunts, and local downhill runs and it stood up to the test. For those not too concerned about needing a super light-weight saddle, it's a great saddle for all mountain biking riding, not just enduro.

Anna Beck

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the hub
AENOMALY

AENOMALY
SWITCHGRADE 2.0 EVO

tested

➕ *Comfortable climbing position*

➕ *Increased saddle clearance when descending*

➕ *Quality construction*

➖ *Fiddly to actuate in undulating terrain*

Weight: 158 grams (excluding hardware)

RRP: $225 CAD

aenomalyconstructs.com

Aenomaly first introduced the SwitchGrade seat angle adjuster early in 2022 to a small wave of critical acclaim. Anyone who has used one (including myself) has nothing but praise for this little accessory, which manages to pack a host of tangible benefits for riders who enjoy both steep climbs and descents. Increased climbing comfort, leg clearance and seated rear wheel traction are all benefits which Aenomaly claims – and I've confirmed – when testing the first SwitchGrade. Now Aenomaly are back with the new SwitchGrade 2.0 Evo. As the name suggests this revised version is more about evolution than it is revolution, with new features focusing on increased compatibility, decreased weight and improved functionality all while coming in at a lower price.

OUT OF THE BOX

At its core, the SwitchGrade is a billet aluminium seatpost accessory allowing you to adjust your seat angle between two or three fixed positions on the fly. Once installed, you can toggle your seat forwards 10 degrees, or 12 degree rearwards from its neutral position by activating a small lever tucked away under your seat. The 2.0 Evo the SwitchGrade is compatible with most seat post and seat combinations, excluding those who are using a one-bolt style dropper post (such as the TransX ED01 and Rockshox Reverb AXS). Looking nearly identical to the untrained eye, the new version also has a stronger base frame and additions to simplify installation, all while decreasing the weight by 7%.

Installation itself is a fairly straightforward affair and is easily achievable by any home mechanic. The only key step is to carefully read and select which 'compatibility pack' you require prior to purchasing your SwitchGrade. This will ensure you have the appropriate shims and bolts required to mate the SwitchGrade to your seatpost of choice. From there, you simply need to follow the installation documentation provided to get your SwitchGrade up and running – a 10-minute task. Note that pending which seatpost you have, the SwitchGrade can add around 10mm of overall post stack height once installed so it's best to measure your neutral saddle height before and after install to ensure consistency.

SWITCHGRADE
AENOMALY
DEFINE THE ODDS

ON THE TRAIL

My first ride with a SwitchGrade was reminiscent of the first time I rode with a dropper post or with tubeless tyres, such is the gravity of its benefit. After toggling it forwards I pointed my enduro bike straight up a nasty steep fire road climb, something that my rides consist of almost exclusively. Thanks to the 10 degree forward tilt, my actual seat angle was as if I was riding along a flat grade, all while grinding uphill in my smallest gear. This meant that I was not having to fight to stay on my seat or keep my front wheel down and as a result I was less fatigued through my arms and back while also experiencing increased power through my legs thanks to the more open angle of my hip flexors.

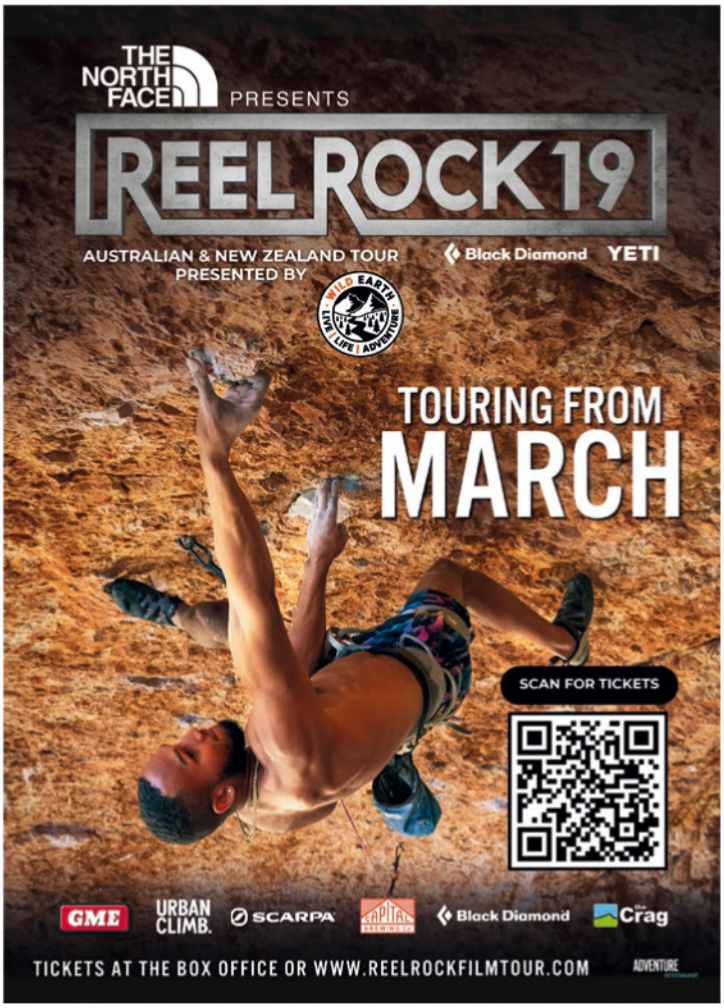
Out of curiosity, I rolled half way back down the climb and repeated it with my seat in the neutral position. This time, my shoulders burned from holding myself on the bike, and my front wheel was skating around, barely staying on the ground. I then knew the SwitchGrade was something I would happily get used to. Inversely, the increased leg clearance you gain when the seat is adjusted to the 12 degree rearward position is also very noticeable. When your thighs do make contact with your seat during a rowdy descent or jump, they are primarily hitting the sides rather than the underside of your seat, which is much more comfortable and less likely to snag on your shorts.

Toggling the SwitchGrade is fairly simple and easy to do on the fly, with the 2.0 offering a more positive engagement from each position compared to the original version. This was a welcome change as I would previously struggle to return my saddle to the neutral position in some scenarios, something which is no longer an issue with the 2.0 Evo. The only time I found the adjustment difficult or prohibitive to the overall flow of my ride was when a trail quickly transitioned from a long steep descent into a steep climb. In this instant I tended to find myself having to shift a whole cassette worth of gears, actuate my dropper post and also toggle the SwitchGrade back to the forward position; quite the juggling act that I would occasionally get wrong.

OUR TAKE

To me, the SwitchGrade 2.0 Evo is a must have for anyone whose rides primarily consist of long steep climbs and steep descents. While the cost of an arguably unnecessary accessory such as this can be hard to justify, it takes just one steep climb to make it all seem worthwhile. Unlike some products, the SwitchGrade delivers on every performance benefit its creators have claimed and has done nothing but improve my riding experience during testing.

Hayden Wright



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Skills

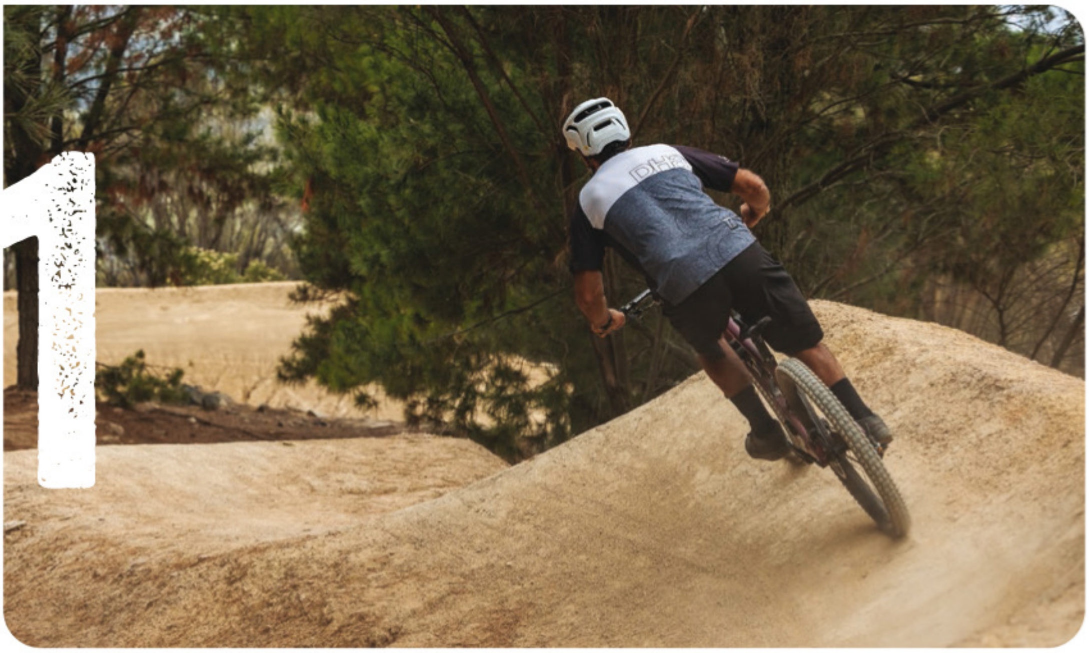
HOW TO: SHARK FINS

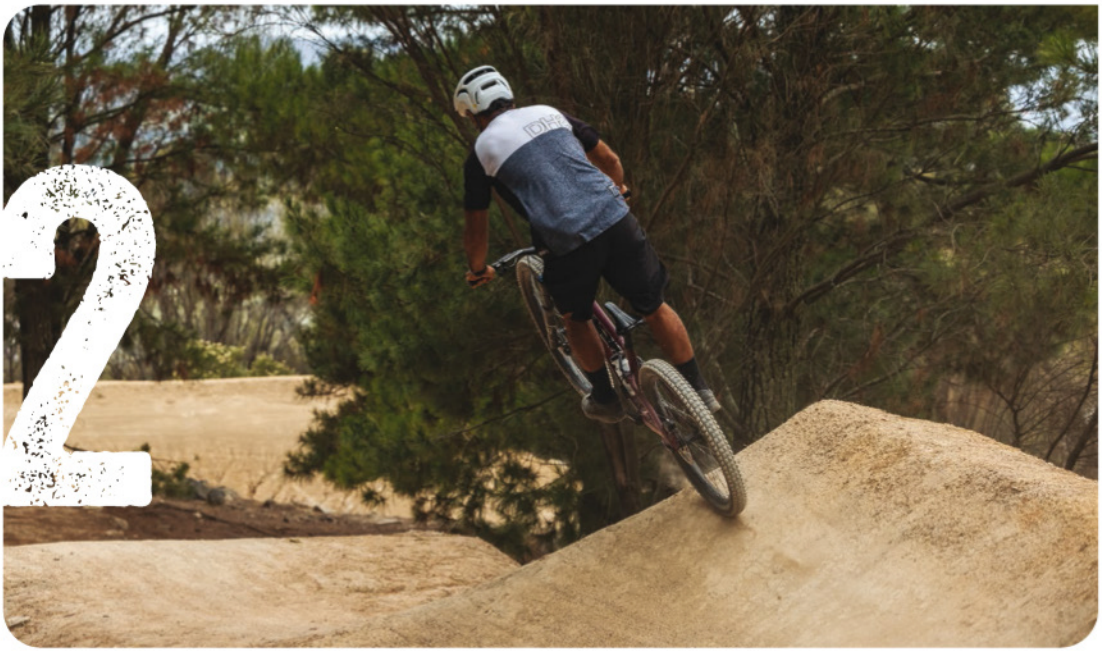
WORDS AND SKILLS **JARED RANDO**
PHOTOS **NICK WAYGOOD**

This issue we are having a look at a feature which is becoming more and more popular on jump trails across the world: shark fins. They're an advanced jump feature but get them right and shark fins are super fun to hit and play around on, and can really make a jump trail flow really well. We covered hip jumps a few issues back and shark fins have some similarities to hip jumps, so getting comfortable on hip jumps is a great stepping stone to hitting shark fins. The difference is with a hip jump, you're taking off straight and landing at an angle whereas shark fins are the opposite – you take off at an angle and land straight. Here's how to get it done.

STEP 1 – PICK YOUR LINE

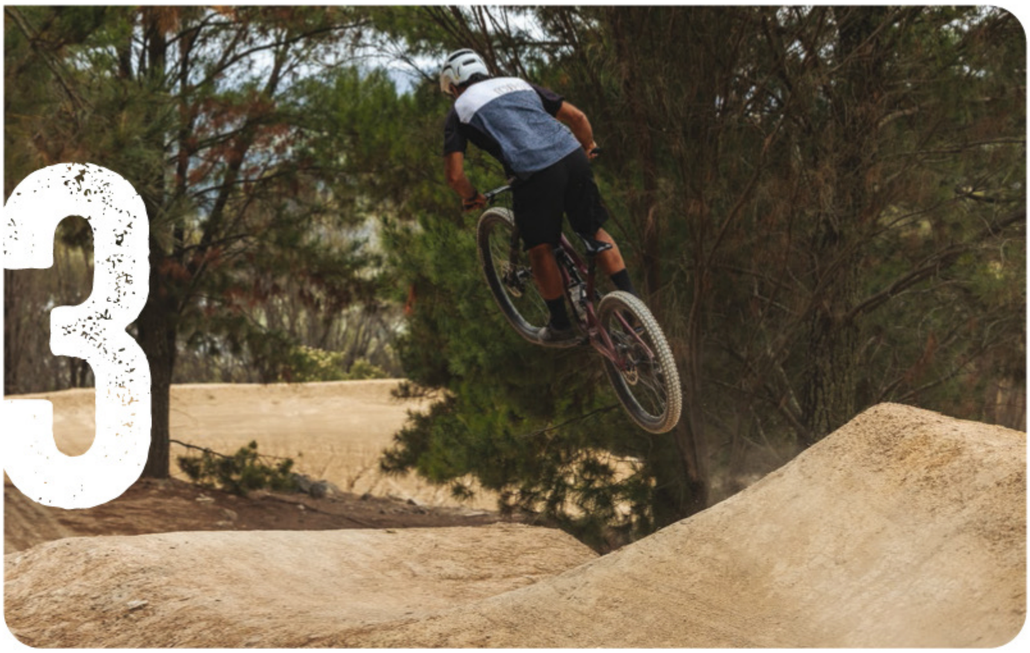
One of the cool things with shark fins is that you can adjust your line to suit your speed and the jump. Going higher off the lip will give you some extra height and distance, while going lower will have the opposite effect. Here I'm shooting for a slightly higher line to get a little more pop to get over the knuckle of the landing.





STEP 2 – SPOT THE LANDING

As you hit the lip you want to spot your landing and begin to adjust your body. Here, as I'm hitting the lip, I have spotted the landing and already begun to shift my body position sideways to make for a straight landing. It's important not to fight your lean angle too much as you hit the lip. You need to move with the jump and work with the angles off the trail.

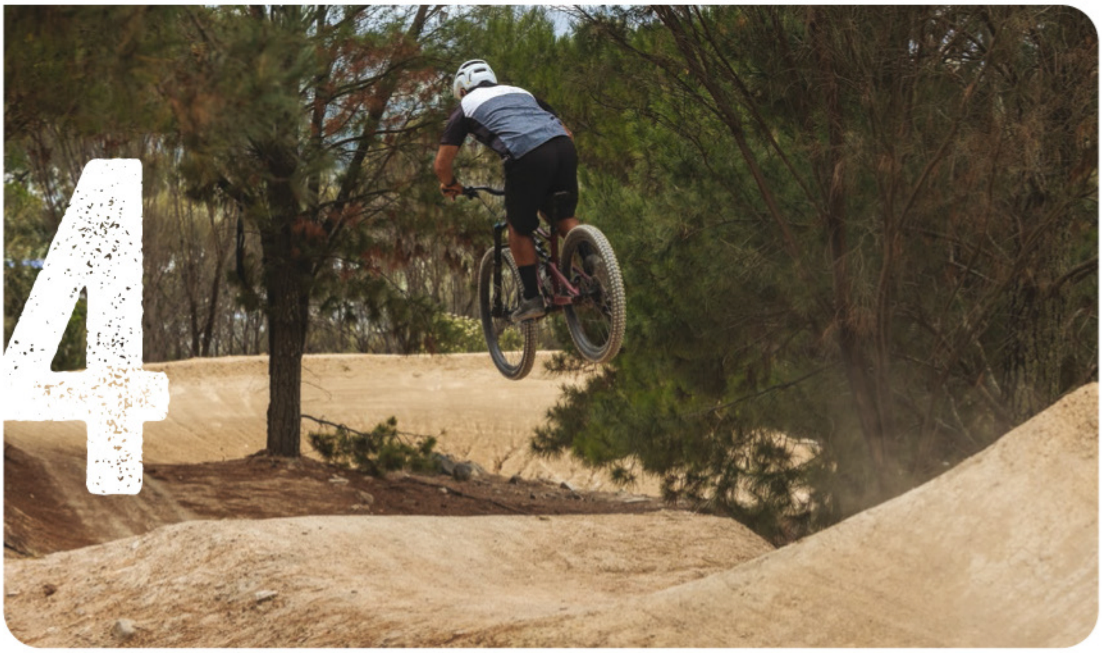


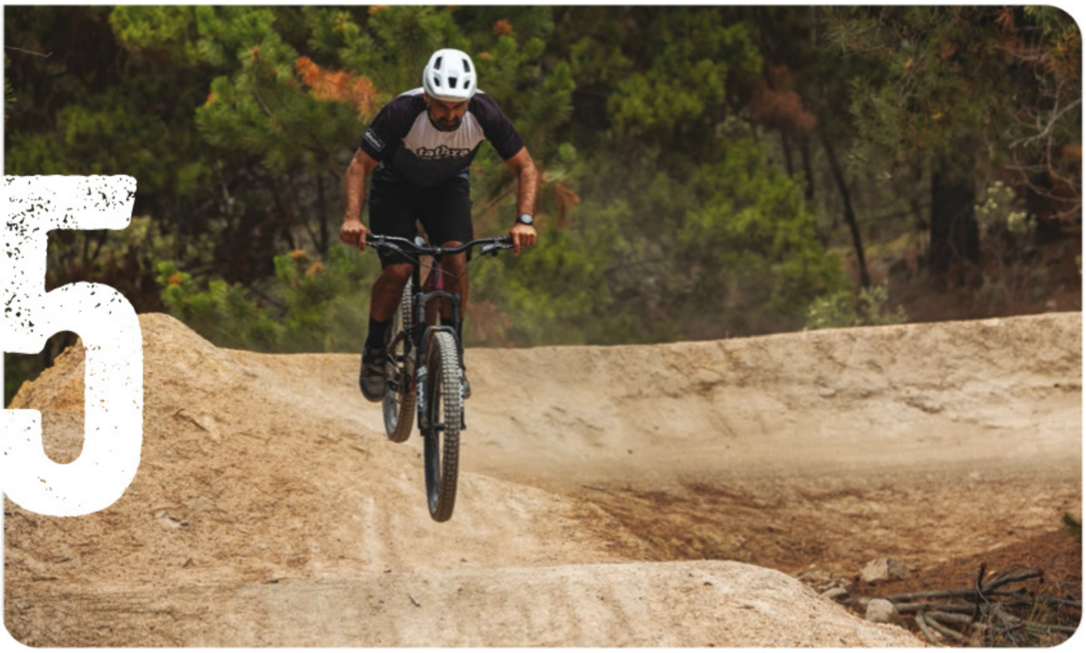
STEP 3 – STRAIGHTEN THE BIKE UNDERNEATH YOU

As you get airborne, it's time to bring the bike straight underneath you. Your bike will naturally follow your body position but you can also use your legs to assist in getting the bike straight. At this point too you should be able to judge where the bike is in relation to the angle of the landing so you can begin to adjust your back wheel up or down using your legs to set up for a perfect landing.

STEP 4 – NOSE IN FOR THE LANDING

As you begin to come towards the transition, it's time to nose in for the landing. By this point you should be pretty close to straight up and down and ready to land straight. The adjustment from the take-off angle to straight shouldn't be forced – it needs to be steady and smooth so by the time you get to this point everything should be flowing smoothly.





STEP 5 – LAND SMOOTH

Aim for a gentle and smooth landing. This helps with any extra momentum still with you from the body position adjustment. Use your whole body to absorb the landing, but be as gentle as possible so that all the sideways and downwards momentum is absorbed in one gentle movement. Once you've touched town, don't forget to look ahead for the next one as these features are regularly in twos!

Nutrition

THE CHERRY ON TOP

Emerging supplements to boost performance

WORDS ZOE WILSON APD / PHOTOS NICK WAYGOOD, QUAD CROWN

Mountain biking is a sport that demands peak physical performance, stamina, and mental focus. Whether navigating challenging trails, tackling steep climbs, or enduring long-distance rides, fueling properly is key. But once you've nailed your daily training diet (the cake) and perfected your ride/race nutrition and hydration plan (the icing), what's next? It's time to put the cherry on top! Supplements can provide the extra oomph needed to help you cross the finish line first if you know what to look for.

Not all supplements are created equal, and it's essential to know which are safe, legal, and effective before adding them to your routine. The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) categorizes supplements into four groups: Group A (proven to enhance performance), Group B (emerging evidence), and Groups C and D (no evidence of benefit or banned substances).

Group A supplements include widely recognized options like sports foods (gels, chews, and sports drinks), vitamins and minerals, caffeine, amino acids, and sodium bicarbonate. These are the staples most athletes already know about and should be the first port of call when creating a sports nutrition plan.

Group B supplements contain some lesser-known options with emerging evidence that could offer potential benefits to endurance, recovery, and overall performance when used strategically and with supervision of a Sports Dietitian. As more evidence for their effectiveness emerges, these may make it onto the Group A list. Here are three under-the-radar supplements to keep an eye out for:

MENTHOL

Menthol is gaining popularity for its cooling and refreshing properties, which can help improve both physical and mental performance. While primarily used in topical products like creams and gels for its cooling effect, menthol is increasingly being included in sports foods and supplements, such as energy gels or drinks.

Menthol has the potential to enhance exercise performance by improving thermoregulation, particularly during long, intense rides or in hot conditions. The cooling sensation produced by menthol can help reduce perceived exertion, making it feel easier to push through tough sections of the ride. Some studies also suggest that menthol may reduce feelings of fatigue and improve respiratory efficiency, helping

riders breathe more easily during strenuous efforts.

Menthol-infused gels, drinks, and powders are now commercially available. However, the AIS suggests that a product like Fisherman's Friend lozenges can also provide a similar effect. The optimal way to use menthol is still being researched, but strategies include taking it every 5–10 minutes during exercise or using it strategically towards the end of an endurance event. As with all supplements, it may not be suitable for everyone, and excessive use can be harmful, so it's best to consult with a Sports Dietitian.

PICKLE JUICE

Pickle juice, a common household staple, has recently gained attention in the athletic world for its potential to reduce muscle cramps and improve hydration. This Group B supplement is high in vinegar, sodium, and potassium, which may help activate taste receptors and provide electrolytes needed to prevent cramping.

Pickle juice supplements are now commercially available, and they may be worth trying if prone to muscle cramps during exercise. Due to its strong flavour and high sodium content, it can be intense and may cause some gastrointestinal discomfort. There are various protocols for using pickle juice, and it's important to experiment with it during training to assess how the body responds. Once again, consulting with a sports dietitian is key, as they can provide tailored advice and help you figure out the best approach.

KETONE BODIES

Although the low-carb craze has subsided for many, ketones may still be relevant in the endurance space, and now you can buy them without having to cut out carbs like pasta and bread!

Ketones are a byproduct of fat metabolism produced in the liver. They become a crucial source of fuel during periods of low carbohydrate availability, such as when following a low-carb diet or during prolonged endurance efforts. Potential benefits of ketone supplementation include reducing the reliance on carbohydrates for energy, boosting brain function (due to increased fuel supply), and enhancing recovery.

How to use ketones effectively is still being researched, and no reliable supplementation protocols have been firmly established. Additionally, ketone supplements can be pricey. However, as more research emerges, this could be an area worth keeping an eye on for future performance gains.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Group B supplements, including menthol, pickle juice, and ketones, offer many potential benefits for improving endurance, power, hydration, and recovery. When used strategically and in combination with a comprehensive training and nutrition plan, these supplements could provide that extra edge. However, it's crucial to test them during training, not just on race day, and ensure that your baseline training diet and race plan are optimised first. With the right approach, these supplements can help give you the cherry on top of your mountain biking performance.

Fitness

IS HIGH INTENSITY TRAINING FOR YOU?

Diving down the High Intensity Interval Training Wormhole

WORDS ADAM KELSALL / PHOTOS BARTOK WOLINSKI AND DAN GRIFFITHS, RED BULL

Spend less than one minute doom scrolling through mountain bike athlete stories on Instagram and you're sure to find a European World Cup legend depicted with an exorcist face, or perhaps a freshly flogged Sam Fox lying in a ditch. These athletes will explain they've just eviscerated their lungs with the latest science-backed high intensity interval training (HIT) 40/20s or 5x5min VO2s. You may look at their pained faces and think "what is this HIT? Why are they doing it? What does science say about it? Is it worth the pain?"

I'm here to take you down that HIT wormhole to find out the answers to these questions and more.

WHAT IS HIT?

HIT has been used by athletes for over a century (Buchheit & Laursen, 2013) and is a term attributed to German coach Waldemer Gerschler who believed "alternating periods of hard work and recovery was an effective adaptive stimulus for the heart" (Seiler & Tonneson, 2009). Hebisz (2016) defines interval training as "repetitions of maximal intensity exercise, usually performed for about 45seconds, interspaced with rest periods lasting from 30sec to 4min".

Conversely, interval guru Stephen Seiler's (2024) key workouts include a longer time period spent at a specific percentage of VO2 max to target in his definition of intervals. He describes his intervals as "repeated bouts of exercise lasting 1 to 8 minutes, eliciting an oxygen demand equal to 90 to 100 % of VO2 max, separated by rest periods of 1 to 5 min".

So what's the best way to go? Well, intervals consist of at least 9 variables and each can be changed according to the aims of the session and event the athlete is targeting, meaning that the best interval depends on a range of variables. These variables include:

1. Number of work intervals
2. Intensity of each work interval
3. Duration of each work interval
4. Number of recovery intervals
5. Intensity of the recovery interval
6. Duration of the recovery interval
7. Exercise type used to do the interval (eg run, ride, swim)
8. Number of sets
9. Recovery duration and intensity between sets (Buchheit & Laursen, 2013)

HOW DOES HIT FIT INTO AN OVERALL TRAINING PLAN?

Unfortunately, HIT can sometimes be perceived as a 'hero' workout that, in isolation, will lead to huge gains in speed or power on the bike. It must be stressed that HIT can cause significant central and peripheral fatigue (McKee, 2024) so should be used in moderation during key parts of the season.

HIT should form only a small percentage of a much larger volume of overall training that includes large blocks of low intensity aerobic (or zone 2) training, threshold training (zone 4), skills training and strength training, as well as rest and recovery. This creates a combination of training intensities and durations that will accumulate over weeks, months, and years of training (Seiler, 2024).

WHY DO HIT INTERVALS?

Consensus across recent training science literature identifies the main goal of HIT is to accumulate time training at 90–100% of VO2 max, abbreviated as T@VO2 max (Buchheit & Laursen, 2013, Ronnestad et al, 2015, McKee, 2024). This has been identified as the sweet spot to achieve physiological gains including: type 2 muscle fibre recruitment, increased stroke volume (amount of blood pumped out of the heart in a minute), delivery of oxygen to the muscles and capacity of the muscles to buffer lactate, all of which results in overall increases in power and pace on the bike.

Riders familiar with training at 90–100% of VO2 max will know it's well above threshold power and is appropriately labelled by sports scientists as the 'severe intensity domain' and zone 5 by coaches (Seiler, 2024, Coggan). It's a pretty vomitus place to spend your training time. HIT intervals require extreme focus and motivation to sustain for any length of time, which usually ends up not being very long at all – they're really very hard!

Using HIT intervals to perform these bouts of intensity and then including recovery intervals in between allows a rider to accumulate more total work time at 90–100% of VO2 max across a workout than they would accumulate if they were to attempt these severe intensity efforts continuously without any recovery intervals until they fail (McKee, 2024).

HOW LONG SHOULD HIT INTERVALS BE?

HIT can be divided into longer work intervals (LI) of 3–5min at relatively high exercise intensity, or shorter work intervals (SI) of 15–45sec at even higher exercise intensity than used during the LI intervals. Different work to recovery ratios are used, with 2:1 and 1:1 work to rest ratios being the most common (Ronnestad et al, 2015).

Performing HIT with either short or long work intervals has been found to be effective for improving VO2 max and endurance cycling performance (McKee, 2024). Studies that have investigated the training effects of both SI and LI in endurance-trained participants report similar improvements with both HIT protocols (Ronnestad et al, 2015). Whether the intervals are long or short, the total training time above 90% VO2max is what really counts as a good criteria to judge the effectiveness of the interval to improve aerobic fitness.

WHAT HIT INTERVALS ARE RIGHT FOR YOU?

Beginner or less experienced riders will experience similar physiological gains to HIT just from riding their bikes most days (consistency) and gradually increasing the duration of their rides (progressive overload).

HIT is appropriate for moderately trained through to highly experienced or elite riders who have plenty of hours and volume already in their muscles, heart and lungs accumulated over years of riding.

Several factors will determine the correct HIT session for you

- The discipline that you are training for (cross country, downhill or enduro)
- Your training history and period of the training cycle you are in (eg base, general preparation, specific preparation, competition phase)
- How stressful the HIT session will be in relation to other training that needs to be completed that week, remembering that consistency always trumps individual hero training sessions. If you destroy yourself doing HIT and take three days to recover before you ride again the session is too hard and should be reduced to enable quicker recovery and more consistency.

In our next article we discuss and unpack the specifics of differing types of HIT workouts, and how to best execute these sessions for maximal gains. In the meantime, ride your bike, build a big base and I'll catch you in issue 213 with some juicy sessions to get you race ready in 2025. In the meantime, reach out if you have any questions on HIT.

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Adam Kelsall is a UCI Level 2 Coach & Bachelor Sports Science (Honours) and coaches XCO, DH, bike-packers and sadly a handful of triathletes. He can be contacted via @adzapples on Instagram or follow @heroDirtCycling on X

Workshop

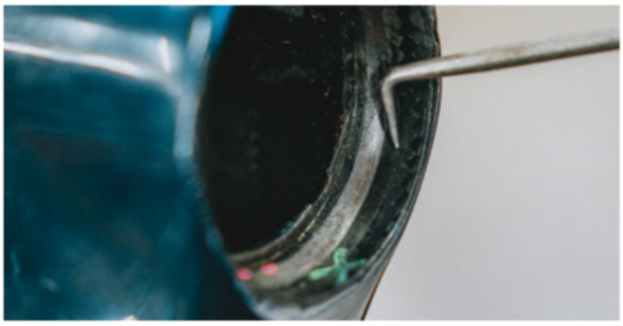
KEEP YOUR HEAD ON!

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHECKING YOUR HEADSET

WORDS RYAN WALSH PHOTOS JORDAN RIDDLE

When it comes to mountain biking, the finer details can make all the difference between a smooth ride and a dangerous one. And while it might seem like a small, often overlooked part of your bike, the headset plays a critical role in your bike's steering and handling. The headset is one of the most common issues I see in my workshop, especially for riders who spend more time on rough trails or on long travel enduro bikes and e-bikes.

It's a problem that can lead to poor bike handling, loss of control, irreversible frame damage or the frame breaking, not to mention serious crashes if left unchecked. So, why is it so important, how to identify a loose headset and how to adjust a loose headset? Let's break it down.



WHAT IS A HEADSET AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The headset is the component that connects the fork to the frame of your bike and allows for smooth steering. It usually consists of a pair of bearings that allow the fork to rotate freely in the head tube of the frame. Some bearings are nestled in the frame directly, or sometimes into an aluminium or steel cup which is then pressed into the headtube. While it's often hidden from view, it's one of the most critical parts of your bike's steering system. A properly adjusted headset ensures that your front wheel tracks where you want it to without any play or wobble.

Now, you might be asking "why does this matter to me?" If you're riding with a loose headset, you'll likely start to feel it first in your steering, usually paired with an audible clunking and shudder back and forward under braking. You might notice that the front end of your bike feels unstable or that the steering feels imprecise, particularly when descending or navigating technical terrain. Over time, the small amount of play will progressively become more prominent and will deteriorate from requiring a simple adjustment to a whole frame replacement.

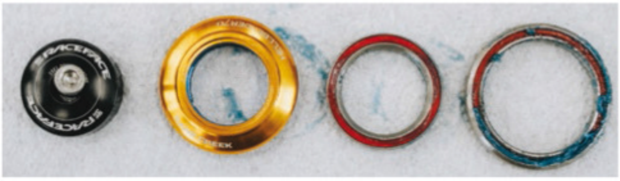
HOW DOES A LOOSE HEADSET AFFECT PERFORMANCE?

A loose headset will lead to play in the front end, which can create a number of undesirable sensations. In the beginning, you may just feel a slight 'clunk' or feel a wiggle when you apply pressure to the front brake and transfer weight to the handlebars. As the play increases, so do the risks including:

Steering instability: As the headset loosens, the bearings inside the headset can no longer maintain proper alignment. This leads to a feeling of imprecision when steering. On twisty trails or tight corners, this can feel downright scary. Loose headset bearings also make it harder to control the bike when cornering at speed or tackling technical sections like rock gardens or drops.

Reduced control on downhill rides: When you're ripping down a steep descent, the last thing you want is to lose the confidence that comes from having precise control of your bike. A loose headset can cause the handlebars to feel vague or unstable under heavy braking or when you hit a bump. This can lead to a loss of control, making even the most fun downhill sections feel jittery and unsafe.

Excessive wear on components: The movement caused by a loose headset doesn't just affect your steering. It can also lead to excessive wear on your fork and frame, which could cost you a lot more money in the long run. If left unchecked, the clunking and rattling can cause damage to the headset bearings, fork steerer tube, and even the head tube of your frame.



THE DANGERS OF A LOOSE HEADSET

The real danger of a loose headset goes beyond just feeling sketchy on your bike. If not addressed promptly, it can lead to some serious consequences.

1. **Increased risk of a crash:** In the most extreme cases, a loose headset can cause the fork to lose its connection to the frame. This could result in a catastrophic failure, where the fork could actually detach from the bike while you're riding. While this is rare, the risk is always there. And even with less severe looseness, the lack of steering precision could contribute to crashes, especially on technical descents, or when trying to avoid obstacles.

2. **Fatigue and discomfort:** Constantly fighting a loose headset can lead to physical fatigue. The extra effort you need to keep the handlebars aligned with the front wheel adds unnecessary strain to your wrists, shoulders, and arms. Over time, this can lead to discomfort, and ultimately, a decrease in the quality of your ride.

3. **Bike and component wear:** The longer you let a loose headset go unchecked, the greater the strain it puts on other components. The headset bearing and cup surfaces can wear down, but so too can the fork and even the frame.

HOW TO CHECK FOR A LOOSE HEADSET

Now that we've established why a loose headset is something to take seriously, it's time to talk about how to check and adjust it. Fortunately, it's a pretty simple process that anyone can do.

Visual Inspection: The first step is to visually inspect the headset for any obvious signs of wear or damage. If there's noticeable play or you can see a gap between the headset and the fork, it's time to tighten things up.

The 'rock the bike' test: The easiest way to check for looseness is to perform the 'rock the bike' test. Stand straddling your bike and apply the front brake with one hand and pinching where the headtube and top bearing cover intersect. While holding the brake, push the bike back and forth. If you feel any play or movement in the headset, it's a clear sign that it's loose.

Tightening or adjusting the headset: If you notice play in the headset, you'll need to tighten the headset bolt – after loosening the stem's pinch bolts. Be careful not to overtighten, this is a bearing preload adjustment, not the bolt that holds everything together. One eighth of a turn may be too much, which risks over-preloading the bearing, causing premature wear or crushing and damaging the bearing races or cup surfaces.

Ideally the headset needs to be as loose as possible without play. With new bikes, headsets or bearings often compress and become loose over the first few rides so if you have replaced a bearing or on a new steed, slightly firmer than normal is ok. If you're adjusting your headset and it binds up becoming stiff to turn, there is too much preload and you will need to back the tension off slightly. If the headset feels 'notchy' it is likely that the bearings are worn and require replacement.

If you're unsure, it's always worth taking your bike to a mechanic for a proper inspection.

CONCLUSION

In mountain biking, it's easy to focus on the flashy stuff – new tires, a shiny new fork, or upgraded brakes. But, as with all things bike-related, it's the small details that can make the biggest difference. A loose headset might seem like a minor issue, but it can have a major impact on your safety and performance. Regularly check your headset for play, and make sure it's properly tightened. By doing so, you'll ensure that your bike handles like a dream, and most importantly, that you stay safe on the trail.

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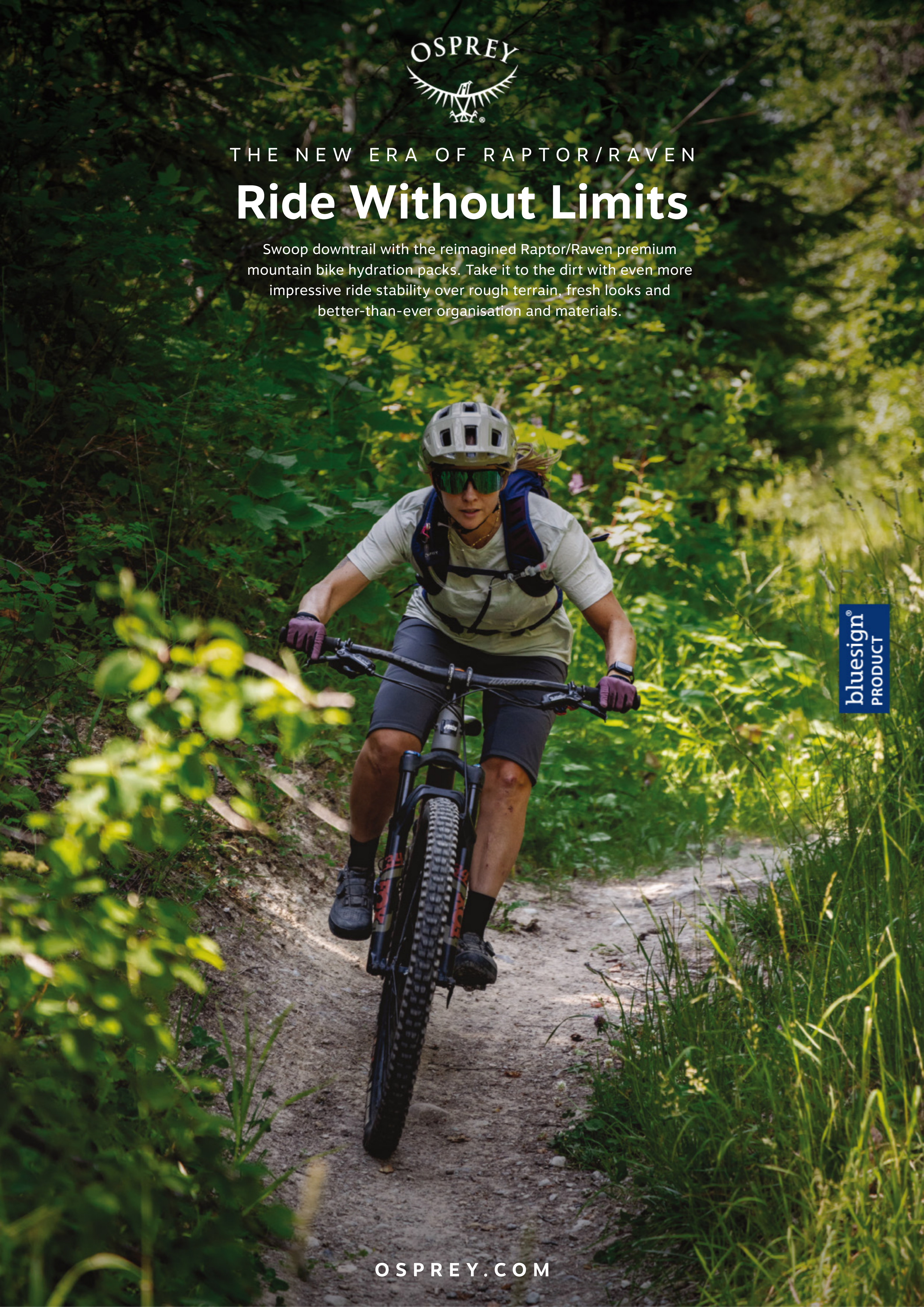

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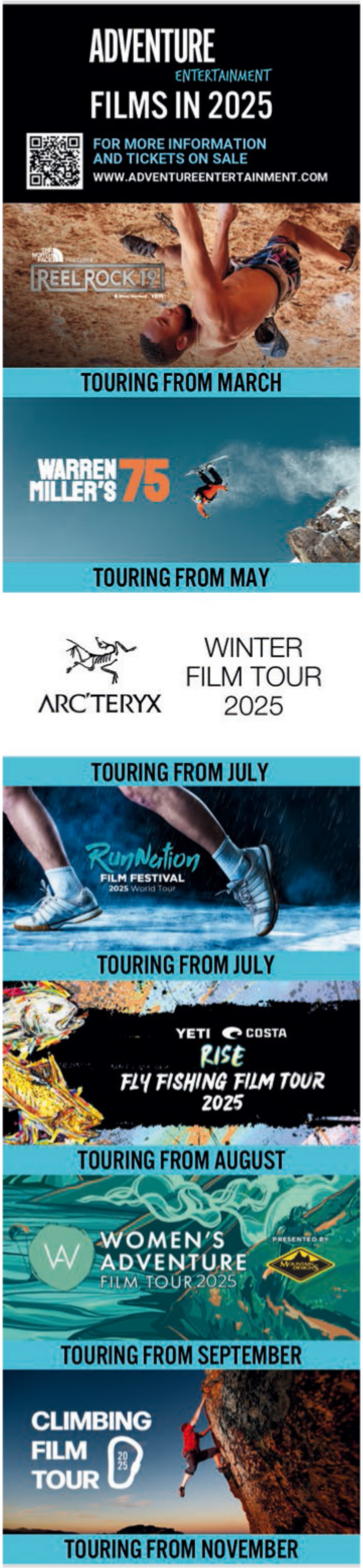
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